





AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY

THIS COUNTRY CALLED BELARUS

Uladzimir Arloŭ
Źmicier Hierasimovič



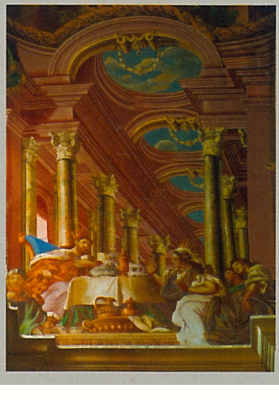













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KALLIGRAM

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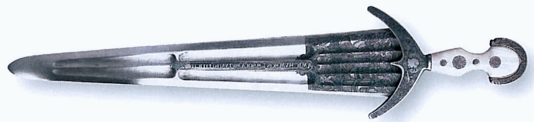
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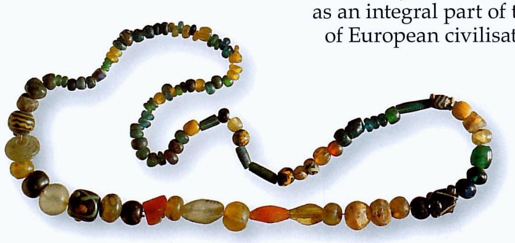








This book for the general reader offers a survey
of the history of Belarus from the earliest period
up to the beginning of the 20th century.
On its pages readers will meet the great figures
of Belarusian history. They will discover how
Belarusians lived at different stages of their history,
what wars they had to fight and how they developed culturally.
The book contains more than two thousand illustrations, including
unique manuscript miniatures,
mediaeval engravings and rare photographs.
Many of the illustrations have never previously been published.
The history of Belarus is here presented
as an integral part of the development
of European civilisation as a whole.





Translator's Note to the Reader

This book tells the story, from a uniquely Belarusian perspective, of how Belarus came to be. For the reader this means that place names and the names of prominent historical figures appear in guises that differ, sometimes markedly, from what is traditionally regarded as 'standard'. For instance, the hero of both the American Revolution and the anti-Russian insurrection of 1794, Tadeusz Kościuszko, was actually born in what is now Belarus and appears in this book as Tadevuš Kaściuška. The capital of Belarus is usually known as Minsk; in Belarusian it is Miensk; the regional centres often called Brest and Hrodna are for Belarusians Bieraście and Horadnia, respectively. The name of the Belarusian city where Marc Chagall was born is usually spelt as Vitebsk; in Belarusian it is in fact Viciebsk.

Cities in lands adjacent to what is now the Republic of Belarus also played a crucial role in the history of the region as a whole. Of these the most important is undoubtedly what is now the capital of the modern Republic of Lithuania, Vilnius. For Belarusians it is Vilnia.

This principle is extended to Ukrainian names. The capital of Ukraine is Kyiv, rather than Kiev; the name of the ruler who brought Orthodox Christianity to this part of the world is Volodymyr, not Vladimir.

It has to be remembered that the small modern Baltic state called Lithuania (*Lietuva* in its official language) should not be confused with the multiethnic historical Grand Duchy of Lithuania, in which the dominant part was played by the ancestors of modern Belarusians.

As an aid to the reader, when a place or personal name is mentioned for the first time in its Belarusian form, the more familiar form – usually Polish – is sometimes given in brackets.

The system of transliteration from the Belarusian Cyrillic script employed in this book is the only one permitted by law for use in the Republic of Belarus.

More detail can be found at
http://www.translitteration.com/transliteration/en/belarusian/national/.





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Contents





Fossil fern from ancient marshes, which turned into coal-bearing sequences

BEFORE THE COMING OF HOMO SAPIENS

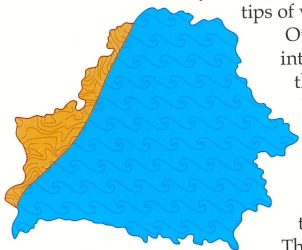
More than 500 million years ago the whole area now occupied by Belarus was covered with mountains. Some of these peaks were several kilometres high, and were in no way inferior to the Mont Blanc of today. The mountain ranges were frequently shaken by earthquakes and the bare stony landscapes would have been illuminated by the fiery tips of volcanoes.

Over millions of years the effect of wind and water turned the mountains into a lifeless wasteland. The dry land was invaded by seas in which living things had already begun to thrive. The first primitive fish appeared.

Around 500 million years ago most of today's Belarus was at the bottom of the sea. Only its extreme north-western edge was dry land, a stony plain entirely devoid of life. This period in the Earth's history is known as the Palaeozoic era, or, in translation from Greek, the 'era of ancient life'.

It took several more dozens of millions of years for the Earth's crust to settle down and for the sea to occupy a more or less constant area. This was a time when the territory of Belarus was for the most part a featureless plain. Plant life flourished along the sea shore, providing shelter for amphibious creatures.

The Mesozoic era, the era of 'middle life', began some 225 million years ago; it was crucial for the development of animal life. The sea would retreat and then advance again, while animals of the most varied sizes and habits – from small lizards to mighty dinosaurs – ruled the tropical forests that covered the territory. Among those creatures were the very first birds, as well as mammals that gave birth to live young and suckled them.



About 500 million years ago most of the territory of modern Belarus was under the sea. There was dry land only in the most north-westerly part, a lifeless stony plain



About 45–50 million years ago the territory of modern Belarus was still a region washed by the sea, with subtropical forests and sandy beaches where palm trees grew. Only later did the sea retreat completely

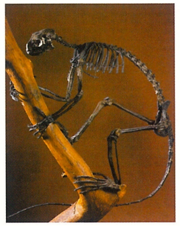


This amphibian was just one of the many 'steps' in the evolution of the Earth's fauna from fish to humanoid apes

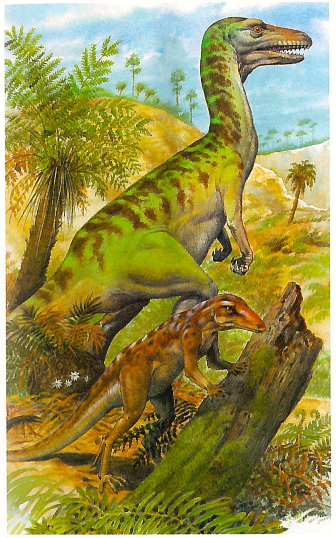


Flora and fauna of prehistoric oceans

Smilodectes lived about 50 million years ago. It resembled the modern lemur



Coelophysus bauri is one of the earliest known carnivorous dinosaurs. These ravenous creatures reached a height of three metres and ruled the planet some 200 million years ago



Archaeopteryx, the earliest known bird. Roughly the size of a pigeon, it had three additional claws on its wings



Almost all species of dinosaurs died out very suddenly towards the end of the Mesozoic era. Many other species of animals and plants also disappeared. Scientists believe that this could have been caused by an impact event, *eg* by the Earth colliding with an asteroid, or some other cosmic cataclysm that brought about a rapid change in the climate.

Some 70 million years ago the Mesozoic era was replaced by the Caenozoic, or 'new life' era, the one in which we live today.

The sea finally retreated from the territory of modern Belarus about 45 million years ago. The subtropical climate disappeared with it. Forests of broad-leaved and mixed broad- and needle-leaved trees grew in place of the tropical and sub-tropical jungles in the colder climate.

The earliest humans appeared on Earth some two million years ago. They first emerged a long way from what is now Belarus, in warmer regions that were better suited to life. However, when humans learned how to make fire, construct shelters and cover themselves with animal skins for protection against the cold, they were able to spread out from the tropical and subtropical regions of the planet to areas where the temperatures were lower.

By the end of the Palaeozoic era the Earth's surface was covered with huge ferns, horsetails and clubmosses



This tooth from a tyrannosaurus was an ideal hunting tool for the animal



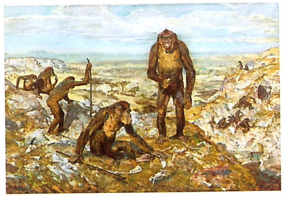


Flint spearhead, found in the Bieraście province. Late Neolithic

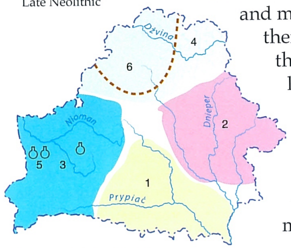
THE EVIDENCE FOR EARLY HUMAN HABITATION IN BELARUS

The epoch of great glacial ages began some million years ago. Among the results were significant changes in the animal and plant life on what is now the territory of Belarus. The forests became predominantly coniferous; the animals living in the area now came to include bears, wolves, elk, aurochs and horses. Animals from earlier periods – rhinoceroses, elephants and mastodons – continued to exist alongside them, but the only species to have a chance of survival were those which were able to adapt to the cold by developing thick, long hair.

The last ice age began 90,000 years ago. The mixed coniferous and deciduous forests were supplanted by dense pine forests and later by tundra. The largest animals to inhabit these vast frozen plains were mammoths and hairy rhinoceroses.



Australopiths, the earliest hominids, first appeared some 4–5 million years ago



Map showing settlements of Neolithic tribes of various cultures on the territory of Belarus:
1 – Dnieper-Donets'k;
2 – Upper Dnieper;
3 – Nioman;
4 – Narva;
5 – Globular Amphora;
6 – Corded Ware



This is how a Neanderthal male, one of the earliest human inhabitants of the territory of modern Belarus, would have looked



Prehistoric humans constructed shelters like this. Artist's impression

Traces of the earliest humans, referred to as Neanderthals, on this territory date back 100,000 years.



Cliff drawing from the area of Lake Onega

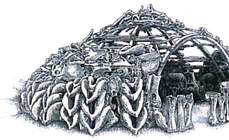
Archaeologists have discovered Cro-Magnon settlements underneath a layer of sand several metres thick, not far from Juravičy in the Kalinkavičy district and Bierdyž in the Čačersk district.



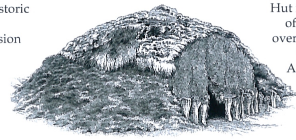
A long path of development still lay ahead before the appearance of modern humans

CHRONOLOGY

100,000 years ago – first humans appear on the lands of Belarus
5,000–100,000 years ago – Stone Age
25,000 years ago – evidence of the earliest human settlements on the lands of Belarus



Frame of a prehistoric dwelling. Artist's impression

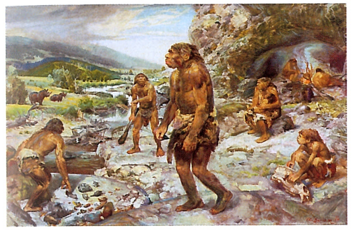


Hut made out of a frame of mammoth bones over which animal pelts were stretched. Artist's impression



Woman collecting honey. Rock drawing. Spain

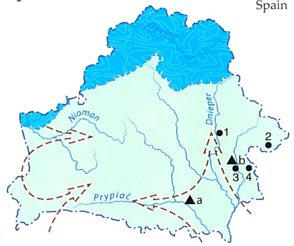
The first members of the genus *Homo* to settle in Europe were the Neanderthals. They were markedly different from modern humans, *Homo sapiens*, but were already able to cook meat on an open fire, construct simple dwellings and fashion the tools and weapons they needed. Stone was the primary material they used for making implements to chop wood, dig the soil and kill animals. For this reason the period is known as the Stone Age.



Neanderthal encampment. Modern drawing



Arrowhead from the Neolithic site at Asaviec, Biešankovičy district

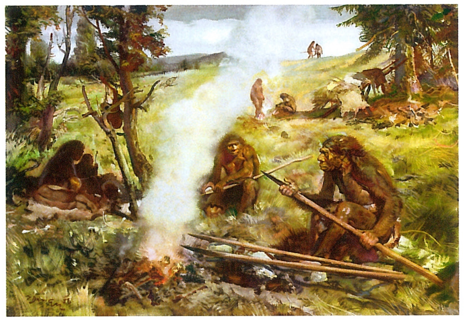


Map showing the distribution of the earliest settlements on what is now Belarus:
1–4 – sites where Neanderthal flint tools have been found;
a, b – late Palaeolithic sites at Juravičy and Bierdyž.
The blue area in the north of Belarus shows the extent of ice coverage. The arrows of the broken lines show the routes taken by tribes of reindeer hunters



Cro-Magnon hunter. Artist's impression

Heating stone prior to knapping it into spearheads



No traces of settlements from this period have been found in Belarus. All that remained of the Neanderthals were flint tools discovered by archaeologists in the basin of the river Dnieper (Dniapro).

We still do not know why, but for some reason the Neanderthals disappeared completely about 35,000–40,000 years ago. Their place was taken by the Cro-Magnon people; in appearance they were virtually the same as modern humans.



Tools like these were used by prehistoric humans for work and hunting



Late Palaeolithic hunters' encampment. Artist's impression

About 25,000 years ago Cro-Magnon people arrived in the south of what is now Belarus.
For shelter they built huts of large mammoth bones and stakes with a covering of animal skins. Around their settlements stretched the boundless frozen tundra; the people had to keep their fires burning day and night. They used to hunt mammoth, as well as hairy rhinoceroses, aurochs, horses, reindeer, bears, wolves and hares. When going on a hunt the men would equip themselves with wooden shafts on to which sharp pointed stone flakes had been hafted. These earliest settlements on the territory of what is now Belarus date back to the oldest period of the Stone Age, the Palaeolithic.

Tribes of hunters appeared on what is now Belarus at the very end of the Palaeolithic era, 12,000 years ago. This was the third, and ultimately successful, attempt to settle the region.



Stone mortar from the Neolithic period



Stone axeheads. Late Palaeolithic and Bronze Age. From the archaeological collection of the Institute of History of the Belarus Academy of Sciences



Flint arrowheads. Late 3rd millennium – early 2nd millennium BCE. Neolithic site at Asaviec, Biešankovičy district

This second attempt to settle the area also ended in failure. Glaciers continued their inexorable advance southwards until, some 18,000–19,000 years ago, they reached the places where the towns of Horadnia, Viliejka and Vorša now stand. The Cro-Magnons abandoned their settlements and departed.
The Palaeolithic came eventually to be replaced by the Mesolithic, or 'middle' Stone Age. The glacial period had already come to an end, leaving behind it a large number of rivers and lakes. The climate grew warmer and the tundra began to flourish with vegetation, among which was the silvery reindeer lichen. The mammoths disappeared; reindeer were now the most common animals.

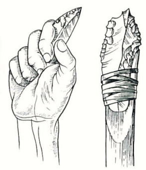
In the Mesolithic era humans domesticated the dog and invented bows and arrows. The furthest a human hand could throw a hunting spear was 50 metres, while an arrow could reach several hundred metres. It was a time when people first learned to fish by using harpoons and lines with hooks made of bone.
In the Neolithic period cultural progress speeded up. The most important development was the appearance of agriculture and animal husbandry.
At that time people lived in family clan units that came together to form tribes. Within the community there was a marked division of labour. The men would go hunting and fishing, and make the tools. The women would act as food gatherers, they would make utensils, prepare food and look after the children. The women were guardians of the customs and traditions of the clan, in which they played the leading role. When a man got married he joined his wife's community. Society in this prehistoric period of human history was matriarchal.



Harpoons and hook for fishing. Early 2nd millennium BCE. Asaviec site

Stone hunting tools. From the archaeological collection of the Institute of History of the Belarus Academy of Sciences



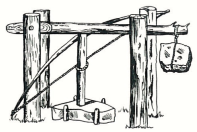


Stone spearhead. Late Palaeolithic

The New Stone Age, or Neolithic period, began 6,000 years ago. More than 600 Neolithic sites have been excavated in Belarus. Their inhabitants had evidently reached a high level of skill in hunting and fishing. They had learned how to make pots out of clay and produce much improved stone tools. They had also invented weaving.

Neolithic settlement. Artist's impression





Apparatus or drilling stone

HOMO SAPIENS DISCOVERS METALS



Bronze cross-like pendant
from the *haradzišča*
at Maskavičy, Braslaŭ district

In the extended family unit controlled by the clan patriarch several generations of close relatives would have lived together. Their combined efforts in working with their animals and on the fields would have been more productive. Families of varying degrees of wealth began to appear. The rise of inequality led to the concept of private property.

The Bronze Age

Bronze fibula
from the *haradzišča* near Malyški,
Viliejka district



In the early 2nd millennium BCE humans first learnt how to smelt copper and its alloy bronze. This discovery marked the end of the Stone Age and the onset of a new period when metals came into use.

However, Belarus had no copper ore and consequently archaeologists have found very few metal artefacts dating back to this period. Copper and bronze were chiefly used in the production of ornaments, spearheads, knives and scythes. Most tools and weapons were still made of stone. The flint for their production was by now mined, as well as collected from the surface. There are several thousand flint-mine shafts on the banks of the river Roś near the village of Krasnasieĺski in the Vaŭkavysk district. The flint obtained from each shaft was enough to make about 100 axes. Tribes of livestock and arable farmers were now settled right across the densely forested territory of Belarus.

The type of agriculture in use at the time is known as slash-and-burn or swidden. In order to prepare the land for sowing, it was necessary first to make an 'assart': an area of forest would be chopped down, the wood would be allowed to dry out and then it would be burned. The fire destroyed the undergrowth, the ash fertilised the soil and the ground would yield quite good harvests for a number of years.

The development of agriculture brought about changes in the structure of the clan community. The men now played the most important roles. They grazed and tended the animals and performed all the heavy agricultural labour. The first metal worker was a man. The clan lineage was now traced through the male line. The matriarchate was being replaced by a patriarchal society.



Earthenware vessels
from the 2nd millennium BCE,
found in a burial mound
in the Rahačoŭ district



Bronze spearhead
from Myškava Hara (Mouse Hill)
near Vaŭkavysk

CHRONOLOGY

Early 2nd millennium BCE – 7th century BCE – Bronze Age in Belarus
7th century BCE – 8th century CE – Iron Age

The Iron Age

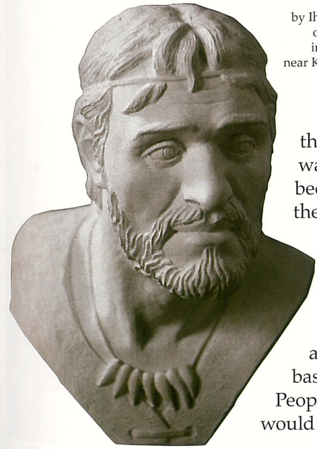
In the 6th and 7th centuries BCE the tribes settled on the territory of what is now Belarus learned how to obtain and work iron. The discovery of this metal marked a major turning point in history. Agriculture now became the primary human occupation, with crafts rapidly developing alongside. Hunters acquired greatly improved weaponry. Iron made it easier to work with wood, cut and carve bone, make moulds, braces, potters' wheels and weavers' looms.

Human settlements changed over the millennia and so did the implements made in them. They continued to be built on the banks of rivers or lakes, but were now surrounded by ditches and defensive earthworks. These were strengthened by a high stockade made of logs. Fortified settlements of this type were called *haradzišča*.



Bronze Age ornaments. Bracelets,
pins and rings from a burial mound
near Čaplin, Lojeŭ district

There was a shift away from slash-and-burn agriculture towards arable farming. Crops grown included rye, wheat, barley, millet, flax, peas and beans. Potatoes were unknown. It was to be a long time before they were introduced into Belarus – in the first half of the 18th century.



Prehistoric miner.
Reconstruction
by Ihar Čakvin and Lieanid Jašenka
on the basis of a skull found
in a burial site in a flint mine
near Krasnasieĺski, Vaŭkavysk district.
2nd millennium BCE

The inhabitants of *haradzišča* defended themselves against their enemies behind these walls as clashes between different clans and tribes became more frequent in the Iron Age. However, the people of the time did not only fight each other. They also traded foodstuffs and handicrafts. Trading of this kind is termed 'natural', because no money was involved.

Property inequality was on the increase. Clan elders, military chieftains, cult priests and soothsayers were growing wealthier. Society based on the community was receding into the past. People stood on the threshold of a new era which would see the rise of the earliest states.



Temple pendant
found in Haradok district.
Bronze

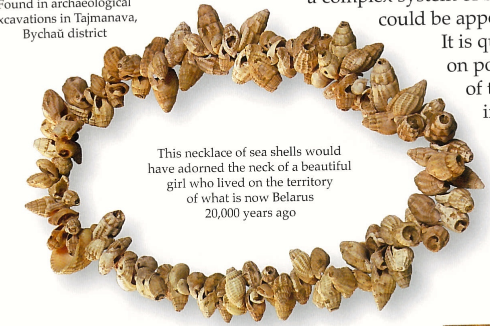
RELIGION AND ART IN PREHISTORIC TIMES



Bronze fibula used in pagan rituals. Found in archaeological excavations in Tajmanava, Bychaŭ district

Even as early as the time of the Neanderthals humans must have believed in some form of afterlife: they buried their dead with magic rituals. There gradually took shape a complex system of beliefs in various supernatural forces, spirits who could be appeased by offerings and sacrifices, spells and rituals. It is quite clear from the evidence of burials, depictions on pottery and small statuettes that the veneration of the dead must have occupied a central position in the belief system of prehistoric people. Famous ancestors who had distinguished themselves during their earthly life were regarded as guardian spirits of the clan or the whole tribe.

People who lived at one with nature traced their origins back to the animals. Archaeological finds, taken together with later tales and legends, lead to the supposition that people linked their origins with such creatures as elk, bears, ducks and storks. Wellsprings and special stones or trees were all endowed with magical powers, as were animal teeth and bone amulets.



This necklace of sea shells would have adorned the neck of a beautiful girl who lived on the territory of what is now Belarus 20,000 years ago

Once early humans had acquired the capacity of thought, they began to try to comprehend the world around them and to find ways of exerting a direct influence on it. This gave rise to religious beliefs.



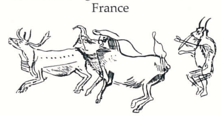
This bone figurine is more than 4,000 years old. It comes from the Asaviec site in the Biešankovičy district



This is how sculpture was born. Artist's impression



Sacred site in honour of the bear. Artist's impression



Rock drawing of a masked wizard. France

The ancient inhabitants of what is now Belarus used items made of bone or horn as ornaments even in Palaeolithic times.

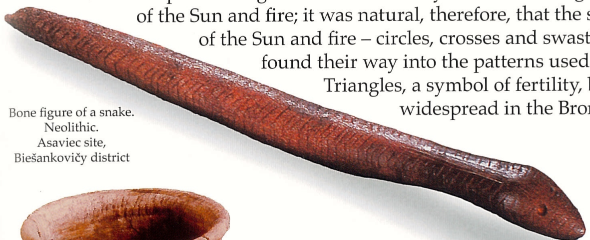
By the late Palaeolithic era Cro-Magnon people were carving attractive, harmonious designs comprising squares, lozenges, triangles, hexagons and various other motifs. In the Neolithic era people decorated their earthenware vessels with ornamental designs, each of which had its own magical sense.

The development of agriculture was closely tied to the life-giving power of the Sun and fire; it was natural, therefore, that the special symbols of the Sun and fire – circles, crosses and swastikas – should have found their way into the patterns used for ornamentation. Triangles, a symbol of fertility, became much more widespread in the Bronze Age.

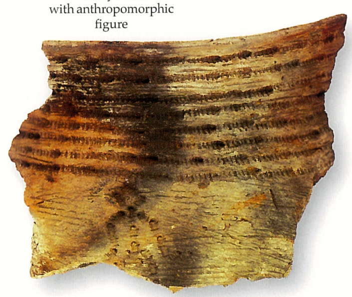


Work of a prehistoric sculptor from the Asaviec site

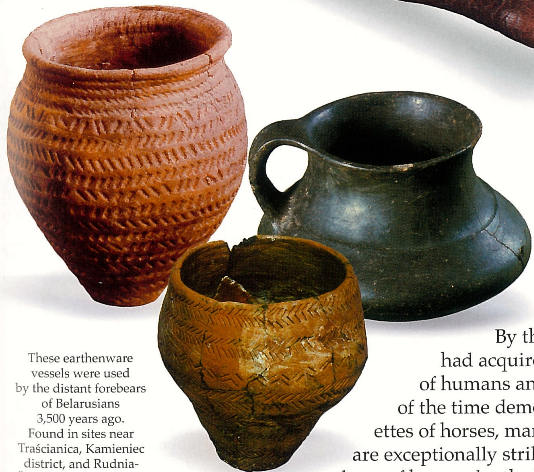
The earliest form of art was geometrical ornamentation.



Bone figure of a snake. Neolithic. Asaviec site, Biešankovičy district



Pottery shard with anthropomorphic figure



These earthenware vessels were used by the distant forebears of Belarusians 3,500 years ago. Found in sites near Traścianica, Kamieniec district, and Rudnia-Śliahina, Vietka district

By the very end of the Palaeolithic era people had acquired the skill of fashioning little figurines of humans and animals, mainly out of bone. The artists of the time demonstrated a high degree of talent in their statuettes of horses, mammoths and wild cattle. Figurines of women are exceptionally striking. They would have been kept in special places of honour by the hearth as a sign of the leading role played by women as mothers in the clan. Some male figures from the late Neolithic and the Bronze Age have survived to the present time; archaeologists find them mainly in the north of Belarus. These figures depicted the guardian spirits of the tribe, but the artists who made them incorporated features of their fellow tribesmen.

Prehistoric people attached great importance to the decoration of their clothing and bodies. Both men and women wore necklaces made of animal and human teeth, pieces of animal bone and fish backbones. Late Neolithic necklaces and other ornamental items made of amber have been found all over Belarus. By using items of personal decoration people were even then striving to emphasise their individuality and position in society.

AT THE DAWN OF THE MIDDLE AGES



Bronze Age Europeans. Modern drawing

The middle of the 1st millennium CE marked the beginning of a new historical epoch. In 476 the Western Roman Empire collapsed under pressure from barbarian tribes. A feudal system took hold that was to last more than 1,000 years.

This epoch, known as the Middle Ages, followed the period known as Antiquity and preceded the Modern Era.



Battle helmet from Scandinavia

The Indo-Europeans

The Indo-Europeans were the forebears of many modern European nations. Both Uralic and Germanic peoples can be found in the Belarusian genealogical tree. Historians believe that our distant ancestors also included Scythians and Celts but the strongest roots that were to grow into the Belarusian tree were Baltic and Slavonic. They came to determine the place and distinctive features of the Belarusian nation in the common European family.



Viking sword



Scythian bronze arrowheads found in the south of Belarus



Vikings. The ancestors of modern Belarusians called them Varangians. Fragment of an old engraving



Sword hilt. 9th–10th centuries

The Indo-Europeans first appeared on the land that is now called Belarus towards the end of the 3rd millennium BCE.

CHRONOLOGY

5th–9th centuries – early Middle Ages
10th–13th centuries – high Middle Ages
14th–15th centuries – late Middle Ages



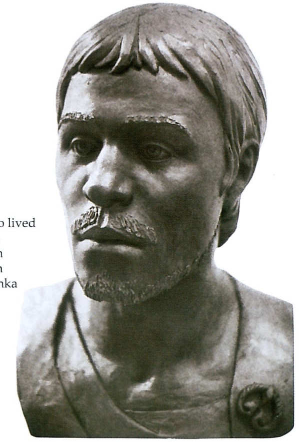
Bronze temple ring from the *haradzišča* of Baroniki near Viciebsk. 5th–8th centuries

The Balts

We know the names of the Baltic tribes that settled on the territory of what is now Belarus in the second half of the 1st millennium. The Yatvingians built villages and fortified settlements in the area between the Nioman and Naraŭ (Narew) rivers.



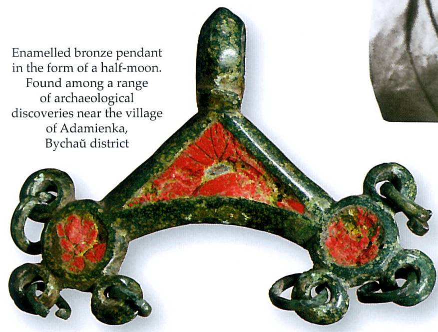
Baltic woman's headgear and ornaments. Replica based on archaeological finds



Yatvingian male who lived 800 years ago. Reconstruction by Ihar Čakvin and Lieanid Jašenka



Yatvingian female. Late 10th – early 11th centuries. Reconstruction by Ihar Čakvin and Lieanid Jašenka



Enamelled bronze pendant in the form of a half-moon. Found among a range of archaeological discoveries near the village of Adamienka, Bychaŭ district

History remembers them as a valorous warlike people that for several centuries successfully defended themselves against aggressive neighbours. Archaeological excavations have unearthed a large quantity of weaponry and battle accoutrements for horses.

Another, even more numerous group of Baltic tribes was known by the collective name 'Litva'. They lived in the western part of what is now Belarus. Archaeologists have found weapons in their burial mounds together with tools and ornamental items. Horses were buried alongside warriors.

Over time the Yatvingians were assimilated by the Slavs and became part of the Belarusian nation. The role played by the 'Litva' was more significant. In union with their Slav neighbours they formed a powerful mediaeval state called the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

On the basis of river and lake names, as well as archaeological finds, we can say that from the time of the Bronze Age the whole of the territory of Belarus was settled by Baltic tribes. They were the ancestors not only of modern Belarusians, but also of the neighbouring Lithuanians and Latvians.

THE SLAVS



Fibula. 11th century.
Replica based on finds made
by Belarusian archaeologists

By the middle of the 1st millennium CE the Slavs were beginning to settle large tracts of land across Central and Eastern Europe – from the Baltic in the north to the Black and Adriatic seas in the south, from eastern Germany in the west to the upper reaches of the rivers Dnieper, Don and Volga in the east.

Distribution of the Slav tribes on the territory of modern Belarus



Where the Slavs came from remains one of the great mysteries of European history. Ancient Greek and Roman authors mention the Slavs as early as the beginning of the 1st millennium CE, whereas the earliest archaeological finds that can unequivocally be called Slavonic date from the 5th century. This was the time when the Slavs took part in what has come to be known as the Great Migration, something that changed Europe completely.

The Slavonic tribes did have an original homeland of their own. According to the chronicles it was situated on the river Danube. Some modern historians believe that the Slavs originally lived in the basins of the rivers Vistula and Oder in what is now Poland. Others hold the view that the Slavonic tribes' original homeland also included the area between the rivers Dnieper and Buh, and what is now southern Belarus.



First page
of the *Tale of bygone years*,
the oldest chronicle
of the Eastern Slavs



Slav *haradzišča* near the river Mienka

CHRONOLOGY

6th–8th centuries – Slavs begin to settle the territory of Belarus

8th–10th centuries – period of confederations of tribes mentioned in chronicles: Kryvičians, Dryhavičians, Radzimičians

The Slavs settled Belarus northwards from the south. They moved mainly along the rivers, building their fortified settlements on the banks.



Looking her best:
what a young Slav girl would wear.
Artist's impression by Alieś Puškin
based on finds in a Radzimičian burial site



Beads of the kind
Slav women
from the territory
of what is now Belarus
would wear
in those days



Burial in a barrow
near Domžarycy,
Liepieĺ district

The earlier Baltic population continued to live side by side with the Slavs. At first they lived apart from each other, but their similar religious beliefs and practices brought them closer together. Near Bancaraŭščyna close to Miensk (Minsk) archaeologists have uncovered a *haradzišča* where Slavs and Balts lived together.

The 6th-century Byzantine historian Procopius of Caesarea has this to say about the Slavs, 'They are tall and uncommonly strong. Their hair and skin are very fair or of a golden hue. They are kind and not at all malicious.' Another Byzantine author of the time notes that the Slavs are long-suffering, they easily tolerate great heat, rain, cold and hunger, and they are also well-disposed towards foreigners.

It was in Petrykaŭ, in the south of the country, that archaeologists discovered one of the first Slavonic settlements in Belarus. Its inhabitants arrived there in the course of the 5th and 6th centuries. They lived in grub-huts part sunk into the ground; the huts had stone ovens. Another one of the oldest Slavonic settlements in Belarus was found near the village of Chatomieĺ in the Stolin district, Bieraście province. The most interesting archaeological finds made there include spear- and arrowheads, the remains of a warrior's armour and of a horse's battle accoutrements.

The Slavs had better tools than the Balts. They used wooden ploughs with iron ploughshares. They reaped the harvest with sharp sickles and ground the grain on flat stones.

When they reached maturity Slav youths had to undergo a special series of initiation tests in order to gain the right to call themselves men. Each one had to swim across a deep, fast-flowing river, and hunt an aurochs, bison or bear. Quite apart from these tests of physical strength, they had to know who their forebears were. If they were unable to name them back to the fifth generation, they could be punished by being driven out of the tribe. It was thought that anyone who did not know about his past ancestry could easily turn traitor.

Bronze finds
from the area of Nisimkavičy,
Čačersk district.
10th–11th centuries



KRYVIČIANS, DRYHAVIČIANS AND RADZIMIČIANS



Silver pendant.
Early 11th century.
From a Kryvičian barrow
near Izbišča, Lahojsk district

The chronicles tell us that, prior to the establishment of the first state on the territory of Belarus, the land was inhabited by tribes called the Kryvičians, Dryhavičians and Radzimičians. They already had princes or clan leaders of their own, from whom, probably, the tribes took their names. For instance, the Kryvičians may have had a leader called Kryŭ.

The tribal name 'Kryvičians' disappeared from the East Slav chronicles in the 12th century, because by then principalities had come into existence, bringing together populations of various origins. However, the neighbouring peoples continued for some time to call the Belarusians' ancestors Kryvičians. The Germans used the word Kryvija to refer to a large part of what is now Belarus right up to the 14th century, *eg* in the *Chronicon terrae Prussiae* by Peter von Dusburg. Even now the Latvian word for the neighbouring Belarusians is '*baltkrievs*'. During the determined efforts to re-establish Belarusian statehood at the beginning of the 20th century there were proposals to call the country Kryvija or Kryŭja.







Mediaeval combs
made of animal horn.
12th–15th centuries

The Kryvičians were the result of assimilation by the Slavs of the Baltic tribes which gradually acquired the language and many aspects of the culture of their Slav neighbours.

The Kryvičians were the largest and the most powerful confederation of East Slavonic tribes. They occupied vast territories stretching from the Nioman to the Volga and from the upper reaches of the Sož to Lake Peipus. Belarus still has a number of villages and settlements bearing names that recall the tribe of the Kryvičians, such as Kryvičy, Kryvičanie and Kreva.





Bronze mace and belt buckle
with depictions of horses' heads.
Late 10th – early 11th centuries.
Burial mound of the Kryvičians
and Dryhavičians. Zaslaŭje



Kryvičian woman.
11th century.
Reconstruction
by Ihar Čakvin
and Lieanid Jašenka



This man lived
in the 12th century
in Novaharodak
(later called
Navahradak).
Reconstruction
by Ihar Čakvin and
Halina Liebiadzinskaja



Ducks
shaped out of bone
were a very popular form
of adornment for women.
From barrows in Barka,
Polacak district

Over time the fortified settlements of the Kryvičians grew into important centres of handicraft and trade: in other words, they became towns. Polacak is the oldest of the Kryvičian towns. It was built on the river Dźvina (Daugava) at the point where it is joined by the Palata. This river gave its name both to the town and a powerful branch of the Kryvičians, called by the chronicles the Palačanie. Smaliensk (Smolensk) was another major Kryvičian centre. Other old Kryvičian towns in Belarus today are Viciebsk, Vorša, Zaslaŭje, Kopyś and Braslaŭ.

The material culture of the Kryvičians did not differ greatly from that of the neighbouring Slav tribes. In order to determine exactly where the Kryvičians settled, archaeologists first examine Kryvičian burial sites and items of women's adornment.



Early 11th-century beads
from a Kryvičian
barrow near Izbišča,
Lahojsk district



Early 11th-century
iron comb
of a Kryvičian
woman.
Bronze rim and case



Granulated metal beads
from Dryhavičian burial sites.
11th century



Haradzišča near Miensk



Woman who lived
in Zaslaŭje
in the 11th century.
Reconstruction
by Ihar Čakvin
and Alieh Kupryjanaŭ



Bronze amulet with depiction of a snake. 13th century. Viciebsk

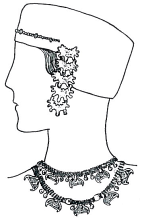
The Dryhavičians (Drahavičians) were another large confederation of tribes from which the Belarusians of today are descended. They lived between the rivers Prypiać and Dźvina. Most historians believe that their name derives from the word *dryhva* (marsh). However, some scholars are of the opinion that the word comes from the name of a legendary prince called Drah.



Personal adornment of copper and glass. 11th–12th centuries. Rahačoŭ district

The Kryvičians cremated their dead and concealed the ashes in barrows which could at times be more than 100 metres long and 10 metres wide. These 'long barrows' are encountered only on territory settled by the Kryvičians.

No one, apart from Kryvičian women, wore large bracelet-like filigree rings made of copper, or more rarely silver, wire. These ornaments were sewn on to the headgear near the temples. Historians refer to the Kryvičian women's temple rings as their 'tribal ID'.



Radzimičian woman's headgear and necklace. Artist's impression based on archaeological finds



Pendants attached to women's headgear. Silver-gilt, cloisonné enamel. Found in 1979 in a hoard of the 12th–13th centuries in the castle mound near Viščyn, Rahačoŭ district

Dryhavičian *haradzišča* at Staraja Myš (Old Mouse) near Baranavičy

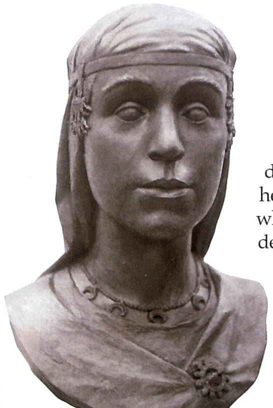


The Dryhavičians settled the fertile lands of Palieśsie, a region favourable for successful agriculture and animal husbandry. Their centres of trade and crafts were the towns of Turaŭ, Pinsk, Davyd-Haradok, Slucak (now also called Sluck), Bieraście, Kliecak (Klieck), Kapyĺ and Rahačoŭ. Other towns, such as Miensk (also known as Minsk), Lahojsk and Barysaŭ emerged in the areas where the Dryhavičian lands bordered on those of the Kryvičians.

Archaeologists have made a thorough study of the Dryhavičian burial customs. They covered the ashes of their deceased under circular mounds. A few centuries later, when they no longer cremated their dead, the Dryhavičians buried them in log coffins with double-pitched lids resembling human dwellings.



Women's temple ring ornaments: Kryvičian (left), Dryhavičian (centre), Radzimičian (right). Artist's impression based on archaeological finds



11th-century girl. Reconstruction by Ihar Čakvin and Lieanid Jašenka

The areas settled by the Dryhavičians can also be determined by the temple rings attached to the women's headgear. Kryvičian women wore simple filigree rings, whereas Dryhavičian women hung large beads from them, decorated with fine metal granules.

The Radzimičians were the eastern neighbours of the Dryhavičians. This confederation of tribes lived on the river Sož and took their name from Prince Radzim.

Temple rings are also the deciding factor in determining the Radzimičians areas of settlement. The women decorated their headgear with rings bearing seven protruding rays.

The chief town of the Radzimičians was Homieĺ. Other old towns of theirs were Čačersk and Prapošask (now known as Slaŭharad).



Filigree silver necklace and temple rings from a Radzimičian burial mound



Amulet in the shape of small horse from the *haradzišča* of Maskavičy, Braslaŭ district. The ancestors of modern Belarusians believed that pendants like this would protect them from evil spirits and sickness, bring good fortune to the homestead and luck while out hunting

The Slavs were successful in settling the new lands and by the early Middle Ages they were already in a dominant position on the territory of modern Belarus.

Towns in Belarus developed several centuries earlier than in what is now *Lietuva* and Latvia.

Victory of Voŭčy Chvost (Wolf's Tail), military commander of Kyiv Prince Volodymyr son of Sviatoslav, over the Radzimičians on the river Piščana in 984. Miniature from the Radzivil (Radziwiłł) Chronicle





12th-century ring from Novaharodak

HOW PEOPLE LIVED IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

Initially the Slavs employed slash-and-burn techniques in their land use. The increasingly widespread two-field rotation system was a greatly improved method of working the soil. One part of the land would be ploughed up and sowed while the other part was left to lie fallow.

Wooden scratch ploughs with metal-tipped spikes and mouldboard ploughs with ploughshares were used to turn over the ground. The topsoil was loosened with wooden harrows. The farmers of the time planted rye, wheat, barley, millet, flax, hemp, beans and peas. Oxen and horses served as draught animals. The animals kept included cows, goats, pigs and sheep.



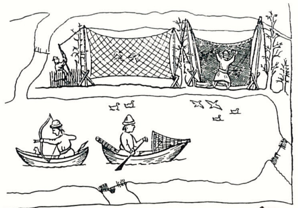
Silver earing. 11th century. It was found in 1957 in a hoard near Dziahciany in the vicinity of Kapyĺ

For the early inhabitants of Belarus the most important activity was farming. By comparison with the Baltic tribes, the Slavs (Kryvičians, Dryhavičians and Radzimičians) had attained a higher level of farming skills.

The menfolk often went off to hunt and fish. They hunted bison, deer, aurochs, bears, wild boar, elk and game birds such as geese, ducks and swans. The rivers of Belarus were teeming with fish, much more so then than now; the ancestors of modern Belarusians were renowned for their skill as fishermen.

Beekeeping was another craft closely associated with the forest. The wild bees produced not only honey, but also wax that was highly prized by neighbouring peoples both near and far.

People lived mainly in small undefended villages.



Using nets to catch fish and birds. Old drawing

The result was a food surplus, which led to a rapid increase in the Slav population.



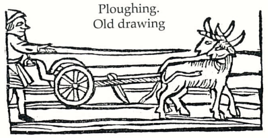
10th–13th-century arrowheads from the *haradzišča* of Kuĺbačyna, Ščučyn district



Building a town. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle



Look-outs would keep watch for approaching enemies from constructions such as this. Drawing by Jazep Drazdovič, Belarusian artist of the first half of the 20th century



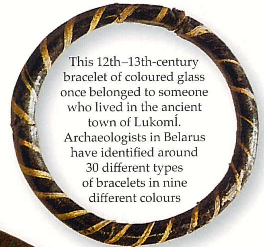
Ploughing. Old drawing



Bronze implement for cleaning the ear, with depiction of a dog. 12th century. Novaharodak



Wealthy townswoman's ornament. Bronze. 12th century. Novaharodak area.



This 12th–13th-century bracelet of coloured glass once belonged to someone who lived in the ancient town of Lukomĺ. Archaeologists in Belarus have identified around 30 different types of bracelets in nine different colours

Different kinds of crafts were becoming increasingly important. A thousand years ago the ancestors of modern Belarusians had achieved very high levels of craftsmanship in ironwork and pottery. The women were renowned for their spinning and weaving skills.

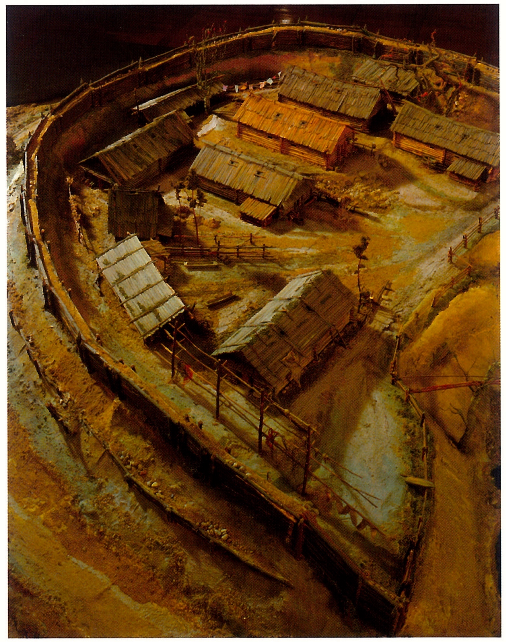


Having a good time. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle

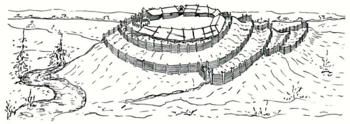
In the south of Belarus the most typical dwellings were half-sunken pit-houses, with log huts being more common in the north. On average a family had between ten and twenty square metres of living space.

In the corner of this crowded dwelling place there was a stone or earthen stove. There was no chimney. The smoke escaped through a hole in the thatched roof. It was rare to find a floor made with wooden planks: floors were usually of clay. If you looked in through the low, narrow window, no bigger than the width of one of the logs in the wall, you would see a wooden table, benches that were also used for lying down and shelves for utensils. Next to the dwelling there would be outhouses for various domestic purposes; pits were often dug for food storage.

On the river bank stood fortified *haradzišča*; they could be described as the castles of their day. These settlements were surrounded by high ramparts and deep ditches, and then by a wooden wall or palisade. Many towns were later to grow on the sites of *haradzišča*.



An early Belarusian settlement might have looked something like this. Artist's impression



7th–8th-century *haradzišča* in the upper reaches of the Dnieper river. Artist's impression

PRE-CHRISTIAN BELIEFS



11th–12th-century bracelet with ends shaped like snakes' heads. It was believed to protect the wearer's health. Dziavočaja Hara (Maiden's Hill), Valožyn district

Piarun was regarded as one of the most important gods of the Slavs. He was depicted as a bearded giant with grey or fiery red hair. In his hands he held a bow and arrows like bolts of lightning. Piarun sent storms and was also the guardian of warriors. His name lives on in the Belarusian language and means a deafening clap of thunder accompanied by lightning.

Polytheism

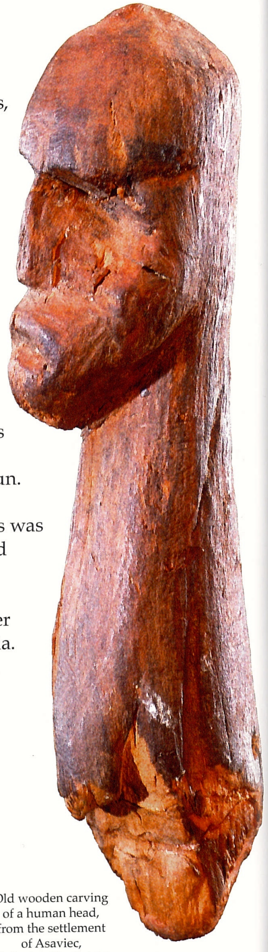
The ancestors of the Balts and Slavs were originally pagans, who believed in many gods. Pagans also venerated rivers, lakes, springs, stones and trees. The people who lived on the Belarusian lands had a special respect for ancient oaks.

They believed that there were various gods living alongside them – in the sky, on the earth and under the ground. These deities were anthropomorphic and shared human habits. People sought their aid in farming and when out hunting or fishing. The gods could be favourably inclined towards humans, but they could also be angry with them, causing their crops to fail and bringing sickness and other misfortunes down on them.

The supreme deity of the ancient Slavs had several names, but he was most frequently known as Rod or Svaroh. He was ruler of the earth and sky, controlling the movements of the Sun and stars.

Jaryla, Dažboh, Kaliada and Chors were the gods of the Sun. The fertility of the soil, the well-being and successful labour of farmers and craftsmen depended on them. The god Vialies was in charge of domestic cattle. Blacksmiths strove to be on good terms with the fire god Žyžaĺ.

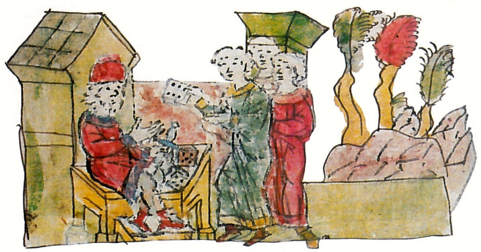
The goddess of harvest and family life was known affectionately as Ciocia (Aunty); the goddess who looked after matters relating to feminine beauty and love was called Liolia.



Old wooden carving of a human head, from the settlement of Asaviec, Biešankovičy district



Slav merchant praying at a pagan shrine. Illustration based on a description by the 10th-century Arab traveller and writer Ibn Fadlan. Modern drawing



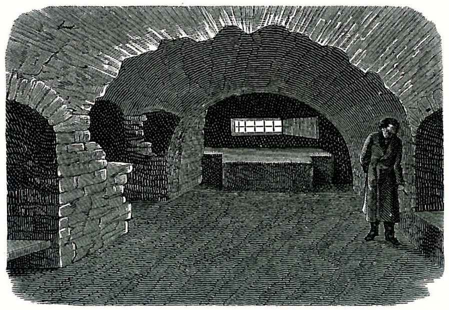
Casting lots to determine who was going to be sacrificed to the pagan gods. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle



Pagan priest standing before the prince. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle

At that time people believed that the forests were ruled by Liasun, homes were guarded by a house sprite called Damavik, and the rye fields were under the protection of Žycień. It was he who was responsible for transferring ears of grain from lazy good-for-nothing types to the crops of hard-working farmers.

People made both large and small effigies of their gods out of wood, stone, clay and bone.



Altar of Žnič, god of funeral fire. 19th-century engraving

An old description of a Kryvičian shrine dedicated to Piarun has survived, 'This deity had the appearance of a human holding in one hand a flintstone which looked like a bolt of lightning. Next to him a fire of oak wood burned day and night, even when it rained. Anyone who failed to protect the sacred fire and let it go out would be put to death.'

Pagan places of worship

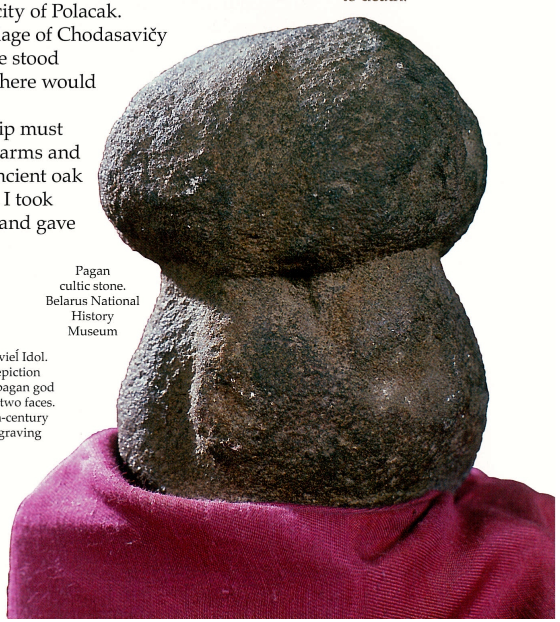
To honour their gods people built shrines in which fire was kept permanently alight. The shrines were usually erected on high ground and on islands, as well as on the river banks and lake shores. There was a shrine dedicated to Piarun on the side of a small lake called Valovaja Aziaryna (Bull's Pond) near the old city of Polacak.

Archaeologists have located a shrine near the village of Chodasavičy in Rahačoŭ district. A large wooden idol would have stood in the centre of the site, surrounded by a palisade. There would have been fires burning around the idol.

Some idea of what ancient pagan places of worship must have looked like can be obtained from old spells, charms and curses, 'In the dark forest stands a high hill, there ancient oak trees grow, there wonder-working water flows. And I took some of that water, washed the aching body with it and gave it to drink...'



Nievieĺ Idol. Depiction of a pagan god with two faces. 19th-century engraving



Pagan cultic stone. Belarus National History Museum



Dedicating a sword before a pagan idol. 19th-century engraving

Festivals and rituals

The pagan Slavs' jolliest festival was *Kaliady* (Yuletide). Wassailers would go around the farms and cottages, bringing with them boys and girls dressed up as Bear, Stork and Goat. The Goat was the leader, the embodiment of the Sun, giving strength to the Earth for a new harvest. This is why the wassailers would sing:

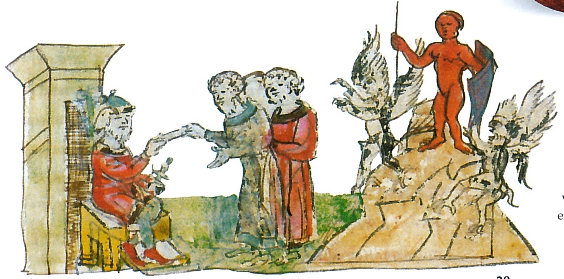
Where the Goat has been with its horn
There will be a richness of corn,
Where the tail of the Goat has been
There a good crop of rye will be seen.



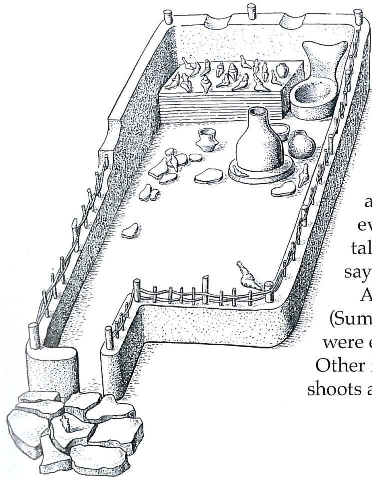
Before the arrival of Christianity one of the Slavs' main gods was Piarun, the protector of warriors and the god of thunder and lightning. 19th-century engraving



Bronze Age earthenware from the basin of the river Dnieper in Belarus



Volodymyr son of Sviatoslav, Prince of Kyiv, orders a wooden effigy of Piarun to be erected on a mound next to his chambers. The idol has a head of silver and moustache of gold. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle



Holy site where special bread was baked for rituals. Artist's impression

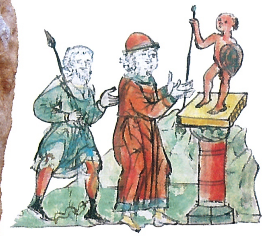


Pagan shrine with millstones. Artist's impression

The summer festival was called *Kupállie* (Midsummer's Eve). This was believed to be a magical time: trees could walk around from evening until the next morning, animals could talk and people could understand what they were saying. Belarusians still celebrate this festival today. Another joyous festival was *Hukańnie viasny* (Summoning of Spring), when the benevolent spirits were enjoined to awaken the earth after its winter sleep. Other festivals were devoted to the appearance of the first shoots and to the beginning and end of harvesting.

The Slavs held their ancestors in high esteem, referring to them as *dziady* (forefathers). In spring people would take food and drink to the gravesites, to share with their ancestors the joy at the reawakening of the earth. In autumn it was believed that the ancestors would call in to visit their descendants, and so places were laid at table for them. These festivals are still marked by Belarusians. In springtime they celebrate *Radaŭnica*; and in autumn they mark *Dziady*.





Prince Oleh's warriors swear an oath on their weapons before an effigy of Piarun. Fragment of a miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle

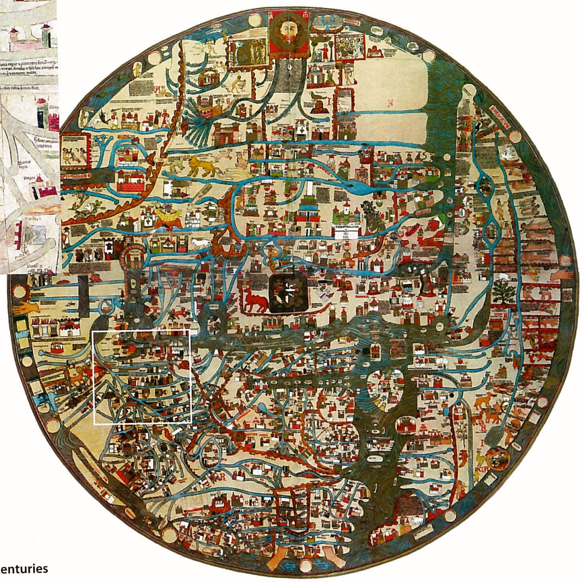
Zbruč Idol. Śviatavid-Rod. 9th century. Its four sides depict the pagan gods Mokaš, Vialies, Piarun and Lada



Škloŭ Idol. 10th century. This sandstone carving of a pagan god was found on the bank of a stream called Sierabranka near Škloŭ



THE PRINCIPALITY OF POLACAK



Other Kryvičian lands recognised the authority of the princes of Polacak and united around it. The Principality of Polacak thereby became the first state on the territory of what is now Belarus. The chronicles also refer to it as the Land of Polacak.

The Ebstorf *mappa mundi* of the late 13th century marks (left above) Polacak and Smaliensk as important political centres in Eastern Europe

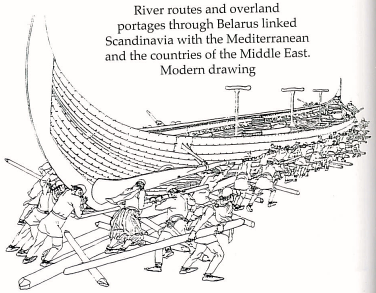
The Land of Polacak in the 10th–12th centuries



The capital

The Kryvičian settlement of Polacak grew on a very favourable site at the confluence of the rivers Palata and Dźvina.

The Dźvina was part of the ancient trading route ‘from the Varangians to the Greeks’. It linked the Baltic and Black seas and so benefited the lands through which it passed. 38 hoards containing 9th–11th-century Arab and European silver coins were later discovered on the territory of the Principality of Polacak.



River routes and overland portages through Belarus linked Scandinavia with the Mediterranean and the countries of the Middle East. Modern drawing

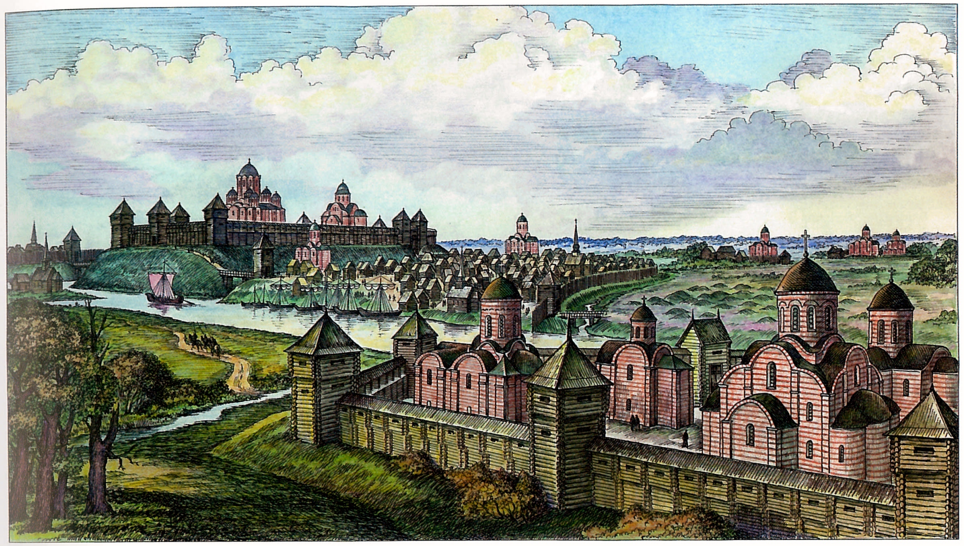
CHRONOLOGY

862 – Polacak is first mentioned in the chronicles

mid-10th century – creation of the Principality of Polacak, the first Belarusian state

980 – chronicles mention the first Belarusian Prince Rahvalod

1000 – death of Princess Rahnieda

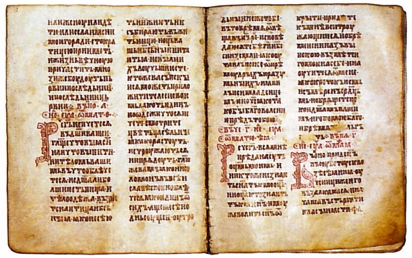


This is how Polacak may have looked in the 12th–13th centuries. Artist’s impression by Viktar Staščaniuk

Given its advantageous geographical location, Polacak flourished and rapidly became the largest craft and trade centre in the area settled by the Kryvičians. On three occasions – in 907, 911 and 944 – warriors from Polacak together with men from neighbouring Slavonic tribes attacked the capital city of the Byzantine Empire, Constantinople. Byzantium was compelled to pay tribute to Polacak after each victory.



Girl from wealthy family. 12th century. Artist’s impression by Alieś Puškin based on archaeological finds



12th-century Polacak Gospels. Now in the Russian National Library in St Petersburg



11th-century gold ring from Polacak

Polacak played a crucial role in the history of Belarus. The chroniclers first mentioned this Kryvičian settlement in the year 862; the Scandinavian sagas mention it a few centuries earlier. Polacak is the oldest city of Belarus, and for that reason is sometimes referred to as ‘the father of Belarusian cities’.



Mediaeval signet ring bearing the inscription 'Prince Usiaslaŭ' in Old East Slavonic



Matchmakers from Volodymyr son of Sviatoslav in Prince Rahvalod's palace. The Prince of Polacak is talking to Rahnieda who has refused to become Volodymyr's wife. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle

The first ruler of the Principality of Polacak mentioned in the chronicles was Rahvalod.



Volodymyr son of Sviatoslav attacks Polacak. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle

Prince Rahvalod

Rahvalod had two sons and a daughter called Rahnieda. The princes of neighbouring territories were keen on an alliance with Polacak. In order to gain the support of Polacak in the struggle for the throne in Kyiv, Volodymyr son of Sviatoslav, Prince of Novgorod, sought to marry Rahnieda. With her father's agreement she refused because she had already consented to marry Prince Yaropolk of Kyiv.

This did not, however, stop Volodymyr. He gathered a large force of Varangians, Slavs and Chudes (the ancestors of modern Estonians) and marched against Polacak. Rahvalod led his men out to confront them, but was outnumbered. The men of Polacak retreated behind the city walls and bravely attempted to beat off the enemy. However, Volodymyr succeeded in capturing the city by means of a full frontal assault.

Polacak was burned to the ground, and Rahvalod captured together with his family. At Volodymyr's orders the Prince of Polacak, his wife and two sons were all killed.

These tragic events, known as the 'Blood Wedding', took place around the year 980.



Volodymyr seizes Polacak. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle



Seeking revenge for the destruction of Polacak and for the murder of her parents and brothers, Rahnieda attempts to kill her husband. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle

Rahnieda

Rahnieda, the captive princess of Polacak, became Volodymyr's wife much against her will.

Soon afterwards Volodymyr defeated Prince Yaropolk of Kyiv and began to rule there himself. He found a nearby village in which to settle his wife Rahnieda. By this time she had come to be called Haryslava (a name derived from a Slavonic word meaning 'sorrow'). The chroniclers recorded what she is supposed to have said to the husband that she did not love, 'You killed my father, seized his lands and took me as your wife when I was a captive.'

Rahnieda decided to avenge her murdered family and all the enslaved lands of Polacak. Once, when her husband was asleep, she raised a sword above his head and was about to strike, but he woke up and was able to fend off the blow. This proud and resolute woman of Polacak boldly confessed that she had sought to avenge her family.

Volodymyr seized his sword, but then his young son Iziaslaŭ came to the defence of his mother. Volodymyr summoned his lords in council (boyars), who advised him not to kill his wife, but send her and her son back where she had come from. The Prince ordered a town to be built for her and called it Iziaslaŭ, after their son. This town near Miensk now bears the name of Zaslaŭje. It was here that Rahnieda daughter of Rahvalod died in 1000.



Cowrie shells for a necklace, found in the Polacak *haradzišča*

The Rahvalod dynasty was preserved thanks to Princess Rahnieda. It ruled in Polacak between the 10th and the 13th centuries.

Volodymyr wants to punish his wife for her failed assassination attempt. Her son Iziaslaŭ comes to her defence (left). Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle





Prince Volodymyr of Kyiv consults with his boyars about what to do with Rahnieda and Iziaslaŭ. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle



Gold temple ring. 12th century. Polacak

THE COMING OF CHRISTIANITY



12th–13th-century amber cross from the borderlands between the Balts and the Slavs

In the year 988 Prince Volodymyr of Kyiv ordered all the citizens of his city to convert to Christianity and then began to spread the new religion throughout the lands that were subject to his authority. The conversion was often forcible. The chroniclers inform us that the military commanders from Kyiv baptised the people of Novgorod 'by fire and sword'. Something dramatic occurred in the Belarusian town of Turaŭ, which was at that time dependent on Kyiv: a legend survives to this day telling us of stone crosses floating down the river Prypiać from Kyiv and turning the water red with blood. Christianity came to the Principality of Polacak in a different way. Kyiv was not strong enough to convert the people there by force. By that time the old Belarusian state, ruled by the descendants of Rahnieda, had regained its independence. However, the princes of Polacak had no desire to see their state remain an island of paganism among the Christian countries of Europe. The strengthening of the prince's authority and the promotion of crafts and trade required people who were literate and educated; a new world vision had become essential.

The rulers of Polacak were well aware of the benefits that Christianity could bring to the state and its people. The new faith was adopted for the most part voluntarily and spread peacefully throughout the lands settled by the Kryvičians. Christianity came to Belarus without compulsion and co-existed for several centuries in peace with the earlier pagan world view.



St Nicholas and St Stephen. Stone icon from Miensk. First half of the 13th century



Greek philosopher shows Prince Volodymyr of Kyiv a depiction of Jesus Christ. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle

CHRONOLOGY

988–1001 – Iziaslaŭ reigns in Polacak

992 – creation of Polacak eparchy

1005 – Turaŭ eparchy founded



Bronze icon depicting the Mother of God. Obverse and reverse. 12th century. Lahojsk

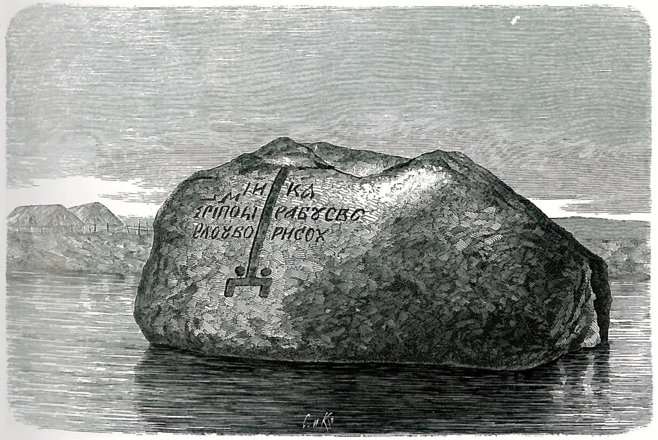


Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle. Some historians believe that the scene depicted here may be the consecration of the Cathedral of St Sophia in Polacak

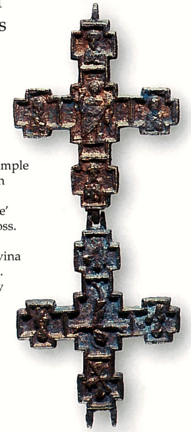


Mother of God. Small double-sided stone icon of the 13th century. Found during archaeological excavations in the old part of Miensk

The earliest Christians in the Principality of Polacak that we definitely know about from historical sources were Rahnieda and her son Iziaslaŭ. (Rahnieda later took monastic vows under the name of Nastaśsia.) The chronicles refer to Iziaslaŭ as a pious and learned man. He introduced writing to his land as well as the practice of teaching literacy. There is every reason to call him the first person to bring education to Belarus. The seal bearing Prince Iziaslaŭ's name that archaeologists discovered is regarded as one of the oldest pieces of evidence of literacy among the Eastern Slavs.



12th-century example of Belarusian epigraphy, 'Barys's Stone' depicting a cross. Found in the river Dźvina near Dzisna. 19th-century engraving



The cross is the most frequent symbol of Christianity. Bronze encolpion (hinged pectoral folding cross). 15th century. Viciebsk area

The long tradition of direct links between Polacak and Constantinople manifested itself in dynastic marriages and in the powerful influence exerted by Byzantine culture. This makes it possible to assume that the new faith came direct from Byzantium.



'Rahvalod's Stone' found near Vorša. 1171. 19th-century engraving

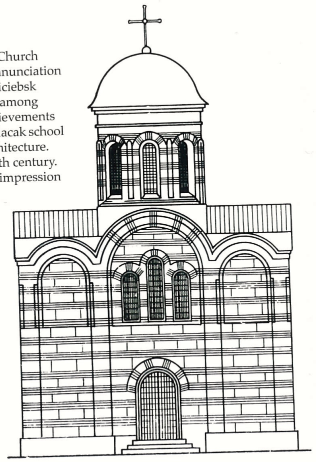
By 992 Polacak was already the centre of an eparchy (bishopric). In the other old Belarusian principality, Turaŭ, a bishopric was established in 1005. The Principality of Smaliensk acquired a bishopric of its own in the 12th century.

Christian culture brought Belarus into the realm of European civilisation. The language of the church books of the time, Old Church Slavonic, became a kind of Latin for Eastern Europe. It was a language that could be understood by people from the Adriatic to the Baltic Sea. Christian teachings improved the moral well-being of society. Pagan sacrifice, blood revenge and polygamy became things of the past.

Stone-built churches and monasteries began to spring up all over Belarus. By the middle of the 11th century the magnificent Cathedral of St Sophia was already standing proudly on the river Dźvina, and by the end of the 12th century there were altogether ten stone-built churches in the city.



St Constantine and St Helen. 12th century. This unique icon of soft stone with gilding was uncovered by archaeologists in Polacak in 1967



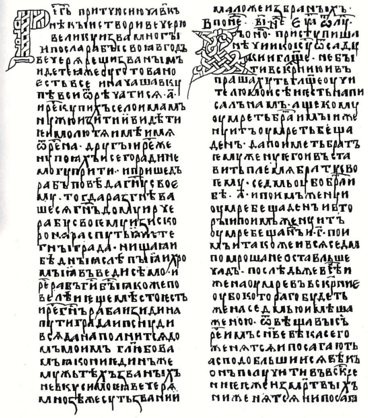
The Church of the Annunciation in Viciebsk was among the achievements of the Polacak school of architecture. Mid-12th century. Artist's impression

The Belarusian principalities adopted Christianity before the schism of 1054. The people of the time, although baptised according to the Greek rite, felt no hostility towards adherents of Latin Christianity.



St Peter. Small double-sided stone icon. 13th century. Found in Miensk

Every town strove to acquire a stone-built church of its own. At that time churches were seen as an image and model of the universe. The beauty and harmony of these great monuments of architecture brought the faithful into direct contact with great art.



Gospels of the 12th century from the Polacak Monastery of St John the Baptist. Page decorated with historiated initials. Now in the Russian National Library in St Petersburg



Churches and monasteries had places for copying books and for teaching people to read and write. Educated monks wrote chronicles and served as advisors in matters of state.

It is known that Roman saints' lives (*vitae*) circulated in the Principality of Polacak in the 12th century. The Belarusian saint Mierkur of Smaliensk was 'a Roman by birth'. Even in those times a spirit of religious and national tolerance reigned supreme.

Basil the Great (?). Fresco from the Church of the Holy Saviour (St Eŭfrasińnia's Church of the Holy Saviour) in Polacak. 12th century



11th–13th-century battle helmet. Replica based on findings in burial mounds in Belarus

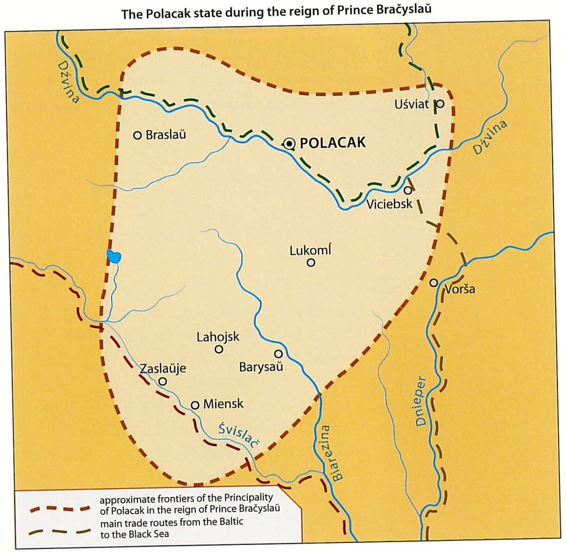
POLACAK REGAINS ITS INDEPENDENCE

Rahnieda's son Iziaslaŭ had effectively renewed the dynasty of the descendants of Rahvalod as Prince of Polacak. After his premature death he was succeeded by his young son Bračyslaŭ. The people expected much of him as the sole remaining descendant of Rahvalod.

The Principality of Polacak was gradually restoring its autonomy; for complete economic independence it needed to control the overland portages on the trade routes. The key towns for control of the portages – Viciebsk and Uśviat – were subject to the authority of Novgorod which is where the customs dues paid by travelling merchants went. Polacak dreamt of rechannelling this flow of gold in its direction, uniting the Kryvičian lands and annexing those of the Dryhavičians.

In 1021 Bračyslaŭ led his army in an attack on Novgorod. At the time Novgorod was a vassal state of Prince Yaroslav the Wise of Kyiv, the son of Volodymyr. The men of Polacak were joined by a troop of Varangians under Eymund. Kyiv had not paid the Varangians for their service, and so they chose a new paymaster for themselves. The fact that they preferred Bračyslaŭ was evidence of his importance.

The Polacak state during the reign of Prince Bračyslaŭ



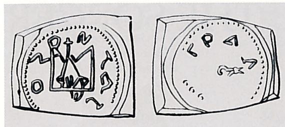


10th–11th-century lancet-like arrowheads from Kulbačyna, Ščučyn district

CHRONOLOGY

1003–1044 – reign of Bračyslaŭ son of Iziaslaŭ

1021 – Prince Bračyslaŭ's troops seize Novgorod. Battle on the river Sudoma



Seal of Prince Iziaslaŭ of Polacak, son of Rahnieda and father of Bračyslaŭ. Drawing based on archaeological finds



11th-century battle axe

On their way back home Bračyslaŭ's troops saw the army of Prince Yaroslav up ahead of them. Battle was joined on the river Sudoma. The East Slavonic chronicles maintain that Yaroslav was victorious, but the reality was somewhat different. Yaroslav advanced no further into the land of Polacak. Indeed he even surrendered Viciebsk and Uśviat to Bračyslaŭ; these were precisely the towns that Polacak needed to strengthen its position on the trade route 'from the Varangians to the Greeks'. The only source that might have been able to tell us the truth about that battle was the Polacak Chronicle. Unfortunately no copies of it have survived.

After the Battle on the Sudoma Bračyslaŭ and Yaroslav reached an agreement that they both had equal rights to the heritage of Volodymyr son of Sviatoslav and that they would therefore rule over it through their deputies in Polacak and Novgorod. In effect this meant recognition of the independence of the Principality of Polacak.

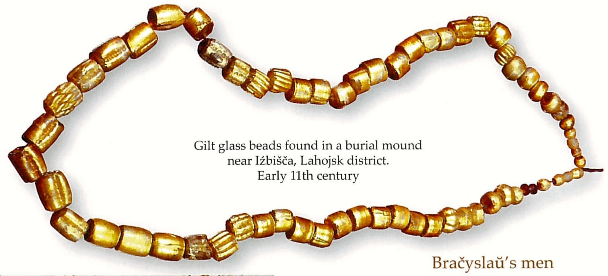
The chronicles record that, following this agreement, there were two separate princely courts in Kyiv, one belonging to Bračyslaŭ and the other to Yaroslav.

Bračyslaŭ's policies, aimed at preserving and strengthening the independence of the first Belarusian state, were adopted by his son Usiaslaŭ, called 'the Sorcerer'.

Bračyslaŭ led several successful military campaigns and significantly extended the frontiers of the Polacak state to the north and south. The founding of the town of Bračyslaŭĺ (now Braslaŭ) is linked with his name. There is a settlement with the same name near Vorša, a town which – together with Kapyś and part of the territory along the Dnieper – came under the authority of Polacak during Bračyslaŭ's reign.



12th-century copper medallion depicting St Demetrios. Vaŭkavysk



Gilt glass beads found in a burial mound near Iźbišča, Lahojsk district. Early 11th century

Bračyslaŭ's men seemed to appear from nowhere before the mighty walls of Novgorod. They took the city by storm and seized all of the principality.



Prince Bračyslaŭ of Polacak does battle with the men of Prince Yaroslav of Kyiv on the river Sudoma. After this battle Polacak fully regained its independence. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle



Usiaslaŭ's rule in Polacak begins. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle

PRINCE USIASLAŬ THE SORCERER

According to the chronicles the most famous of the Polacak princes was apparently born as a result of 'wizardry', meaning that pagan wizards or 'magi' were somehow involved. His contemporaries and descendants believed that heavenly powers had endowed Usiaslaŭ with the soul of a diviner and the ability to change into a wolf or falcon. These gifts enabled him to traverse huge distances swiftly and appear unexpectedly in different places. His energy and intellect, as well as his adventurous life were the inspiration for numerous heroic tales and ballads. Because of his abilities Usiaslaŭ acquired the sobriquet 'Sorcerer'.



Usiaslaŭ the Sorcerer attacks Novgorod. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle

The Cathedral of St Sophia, built at Usiaslaŭ's order, was the heart of the first Belarusian state. It was not only used for prayer. It was in the Cathedral that foreign envoys were received, war was declared and peace treaties signed. It housed the prince's treasury and the library founded by Prince Iziaslaŭ. The Polacak Chronicle was compiled in the Cathedral. The popular assembly gathered by its walls to resolve important matters of state.



Battle on the river Niamiha. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle

CHRONOLOGY

1044–1101 – Usiaslaŭ the Sorcerer rules in Polacak
1050–1055 – construction of the Cathedral of St Sophia in Polacak
1066 – campaign of Polacak against Novgorod ends in victory
3 March 1067 – Battle on the river Niamiha. The chronicles mention Miensk for the first time
1068–1069 – Usiaslaŭ the Sorcerer rules in Kyiv
1078 – Polacak army are victorious in their battle with the men of Volodymyr Monomach



Joint campaign by the forces of the Ukrainian princes of the Yaroslav dynasty and the men of Prince Usiaslaŭ against the nomadic Torkils in 1060. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle



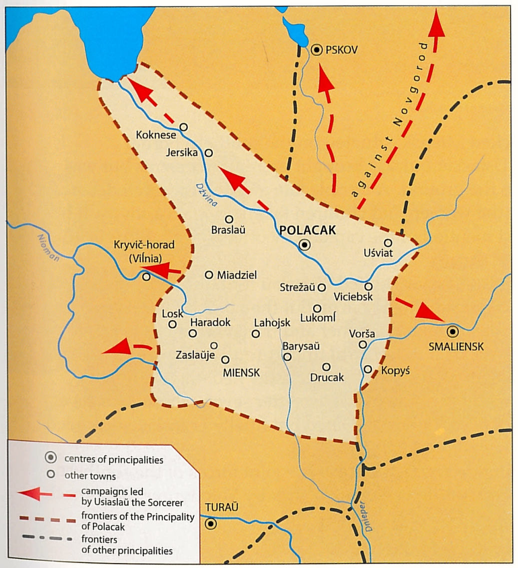
Prince Usiaslaŭ and his sons being transported across the Dnieper and imprisoned in Kyiv. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle

The Cathedral of St Sophia

For the first 20 years of his reign Usiaslaŭ lived in peace with the states bordering on his territory. It was during this period that the magnificent multi-domed Cathedral of St Sophia or Holy Wisdom was built on the steep bank of the river Dźvina, the third such temple in the East Slavonic realms. There were cathedrals with a similar dedication in Novgorod and Kyiv. The name 'Sophia' comes from Greek and means 'wisdom', the power which, so the faithful believed, guided the universe.

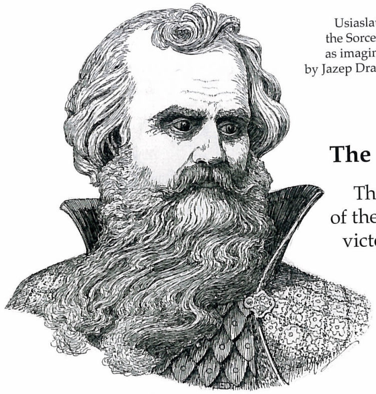
On the huge limestone block laid at the entrance to the Cathedral – and destined several centuries later to become a museum exhibit – the original master builders carved their names for us to find later, *eg* Davyd, Tuma and Mikula.

The frontiers of the Principality of Polacak in the reign of Usiaslaŭ the Sorcerer





Built during the reign of Usiaslaŭ, the Cathedral of St Sophia came to embody the independence of the Principality of Polacak. This is an artist's impression of what it may have looked like, made by Ryhor Dančanka in association with Alieh Trusaŭ



Usiaslaŭ the Sorcerer as imagined by Jazep Drazdovič

The Battle on the river Niamiha

The Principality's quiet, peaceful life came to an end in the middle of the 1060s. Usiaslaŭ led a lightning assault on Novgorod. He returned victorious; among the booty he brought back were the bells of the Cathedral of St Sophia in Novgorod. Some months later the Polacak army made another successful raid, on this occasion against Novaharodak (now Navahradak), then a vassal city of Kyiv. The second victory came as a shock to the three sons of Yaroslav the Wise, and especially to Prince Iziaslav of Kyiv.

All attempts to annex the Principality of Polacak to Kyiv Rus' ended in failure. It remained an independent state and played an important role in Eastern Europe.



Uprising of 1068 in Kyiv. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle

Usiaslaŭ's battle with the forces of his enemies took place near Miensk on the river Niamiha. 'There was terrible slaughter, and many warriors perished,' wrote the chronicler. It was a heavy price to pay, but the Sorcerer succeeded in defending his state by forcing the sons of Yaroslav the Wise to withdraw their troops.

They joined forces and attacked Miensk, situated on the southern border of the Principality of Polacak. Usiaslaŭ quickly brought up reinforcements but was too late. Miensk was burned to the ground. A terrible fate awaited the city's defenders: all the men were put to death, the women and children taken off into captivity. It is these tragic events that the first mention of the capital city of modern Belarus is associated with.

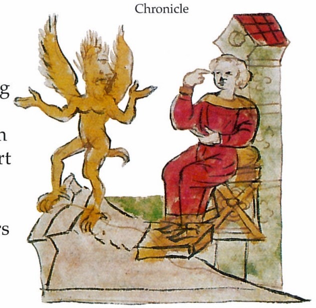
Not long afterwards the princes of Kyiv invited Usiaslaŭ for talks. They swore an oath on the cross that he would come to no harm. But they broke their oath; the Sorcerer and his oldest sons were taken prisoner and transported to Kyiv.

There the Prince of Polacak was held in a fearful underground prison cell. However, a year later an uprising took place in Kyiv; Iziaslav fled, the insurgents liberated Usiaslaŭ and proclaimed him Prince of Kyiv. After seven months, however, he went back home. A period of bitter fighting ensued but finally Usiaslaŭ succeeded in freeing the whole of the Principality of Polacak.

In 1078 Polacak won an all-important victory over the joint forces of the southern principalities, Novgorod and Cumans, led against Polacak by Volodymyr Monomach.



Graffiti scratched on the wall of the Cathedral of St Sophia in Kyiv by Vajnieh, citizen of Polacak. Rubbing



It was believed at the time that those who made the sign of the Cross would immediately free themselves from sinful thoughts. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle

Polacak thrives

The oldest Belarusian state reached its highest point of development during the reign of Usiaslaŭ. In size the Principality of Polacak was equal to many European states of the time, including the Duchy of Bavaria and the Kingdom of Portugal. There were a dozen or so towns in the Land of Polacak quite apart from the capital; they included Viciebsk, Braslaŭ, Zaslaŭje, Usviat, Kopyś, Miensk, Vorša, Lukomĺ, Lahojsk, Drucak and Barysaŭ. Two vassal towns of Polacak – Jersika and Koknese – were situated on lands where the ancestors of modern Latvians lived.

The international authority enjoyed by Polacak is attested by the family relationships between the descendants of Rahvalod and the Byzantine imperial Komnenid dynasty. Some historians hold the view that Usiaslaŭ's daughter was the wife of the Byzantine Emperor Alexios. Later on Princess Safija, daughter of Prince Valadar of Miensk and Polacak, who was also a descendant of Rahvalod, married King Valdemar I of Denmark. Her children eventually became Danish, Swedish and French monarchs.



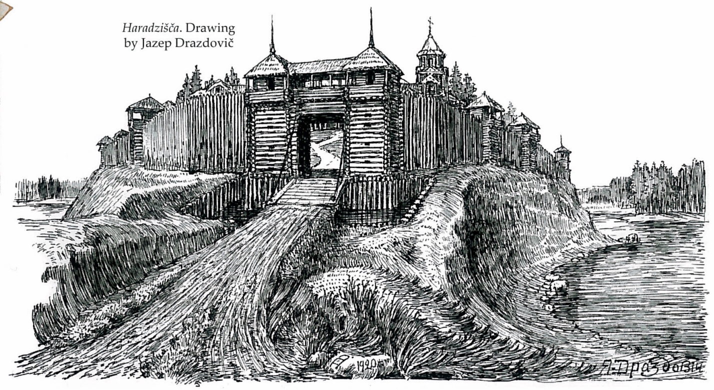
Citizens of Kyiv free Usiaslaŭ the Sorcerer from prison. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle

The authority of Polacak stretched along the lower reaches of the Dźvina river right to the Baltic Sea. This means that Polacak was a seafaring state.

Polacak, together with Kyiv and Novgorod, made up the three most important political and cultural centres in Eastern Europe.



Usiaslaŭ the Sorcerer on the throne of Kyiv. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle



Haradzišča. Drawing by Jazep Drazdovič

THE FIGHT WITH KYIV



Prince Hlieb of Miensk, son of Usiaslaŭ the Sorcerer, continued his father's policy of guarding Polacak's independence. Modern drawing

After the death of Usiaslaŭ the Sorcerer the Principality of Polacak began to break up into small appanage principalities. The most powerful of these was Miensk, where the Sorcerer's son Hlieb was prince.

Hlieb began to conquer the territories of Novgorod and Smaliensk. This gave rise to a second attack on Miensk by the forces of Kyiv. On this occasion Monomach took Hlieb prisoner. He was locked up in the same Kyiv prison where he had once sat in shackles with his father. He died a few months later under suspicious circumstances and was buried in the Kyiv Monastery of the Caves.

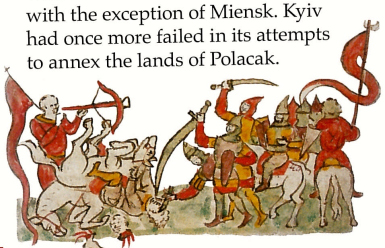
In 1127 Prince Mstyslav of Kyiv, one of the sons of Volodymyr Monomach, set out on yet another military campaign against Polacak. Seven other princes and their troops joined him. The men of Kyiv and their allies attacked the Polacak lands from four sides at once. The towns of Lahojsk and Zaslaŭje were captured.



Men of Kyiv Rus' sieze Miensk and take its inhabitants into captivity. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle

The road to the city of Polacak lay wide open to the forces of the enemy. In order to avert the seizure and destruction of the capital city, the citizens simply changed their prince. They replaced Davyd, son of Usiaslaŭ the Sorcerer, with his brother Barys, who managed to conclude a peace agreement with Kyiv. According to the terms of the agreement, all the captured towns were returned to the control of Polacak, with the exception of Miensk. Kyiv had once more failed in its attempts to annex the lands of Polacak.

In 1116 Prince Hlieb of Miensk annexed part of the lands of the Dryhavičians. The growth of Miensk in importance alarmed Kyiv, which was at the time ruled by Volodymyr Monomach. He undertook a number of military actions against Hlieb. His troops surrounded Miensk, but the two-month siege failed and Monomach was forced to return to Kyiv.



Slavs do battle with Cumans. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle

The Prince of Kyiv and his vassals attack Polacak



CHRONOLOGY

1101–1119 – Prince Hlieb rules in Miensk

1129 – Polacak princes are exiled to Byzantium

1132 – Polacak popular assembly drives out the ruler that Kyiv has imposed on them and chooses as their prince Vasiĺka of the old Polacak dynasty founded by Rahvalod



City gates of old Miensk. Artist's impression by Uladzimir Kuĺvanoŭski



Men of Kyiv return after their campaign against Polacak. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle

When Prince Hlieb of Miensk died, the heirs of Usiaslaŭ continued to strive to keep Polacak independent of Kyiv. We read in the chronicle that the grandsons of Iziaslaŭ, Prince of Polacak, and the grandsons of Yaroslav the Wise, Prince of Kyiv, 'held each other in enmity and held their swords unsheathed, ready for war'.

By the beginning of the 1140s the whole of the land of Polacak was once again in the hands of the descendants of Rahvalod, the founder of the Polacak dynasty. The rulers in Kyiv abandoned their attempts to subjugate Polacak and were trying to arrange marital ties with the city's rulers.

Two years later Prince Mstyslav of Kyiv was making preparations for a campaign against the nomadic Cumans, and despatched an order to Polacak to get ready for war. The chronicles tell us that the sons of Usiaslaŭ did not just refuse, but actually mocked Mstyslav in their reply, 'Go and sort out that scabby knave Baniak [the name of the Cuman khan] yourself, we've got things to do here.'

The ruler of Kyiv was 'mightily insulted'. After his return from the Cuman campaign he launched an attack on the descendants of Usiaslaŭ the Sorcerer, using troops from the whole of the Principality of Kyiv and its vassal territories. Five princes from Polacak were taken prisoner together with their families. They were brought to Kyiv and after a show trial were exiled with their wives and children to Byzantium in 1129.

The exile was in fact symbolic in nature; after all, Rahvalod's descendants were actually related to the Byzantine emperors. The exiles from Polacak did not pine in captivity, but busied themselves with what they were accustomed to – going to war. The Emperor provided them with troops and sent them off to do battle with the Saracens, where they won several important victories.

Some years later two members of the exiled princely family of Polacak returned home. In 1132 the citizens of Polacak drove Kyiv's placeman Sviatopolk out of their city and installed Vasiĺka, grandson of Usiaslaŭ the Sorcerer, as their prince in his stead.



Silver neck ring found in 1962 in a 9th-century hoard of coins and other items near the village of Dobryna, Liozna district



Retinue of men-at-arms on the move. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle

THE PRINCIPALITY OF SMALIENSK



Prince Raścislaŭ of Smaliensk sends envoys to Yurii Dolgorukii. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle

Polacak was not the only principality established by the Kryvičians. They created another one, further east, at Smaliensk. The chronicles first mention this city in the entry for the year 863.

The city was built on the Dnieper at the crossing point of the river trade routes along the Dnieper, Volga and Dźvina. Smaliensk rapidly grew into an important craft and trading centre.

The Principality of Smaliensk gradually absorbed the surrounding towns and territories, *eg* Vorša, Kopyś, Kryčaŭ, Amścislaŭ, Prapošask (now called Slaŭharad), Taropiec (Toropets), Roslaŭ (Roslavl'), Darahabuž (Dorogobuzh) and Jelnia (Yel'nia). To the west the territory of Smaliensk bordered on the Principality of Polacak, and to the south on the Principalities of Turaŭ and Chernihiv. It stretched as far as the upper reaches of the Ugra and Moskva rivers in the east. Here the border of the Principality of Smaliensk coincided with the ethnographical frontiers of Belarusian settlement.

The Principality of Smaliensk attained its greatest degree of independence and power during the reign of Raścislaŭ. He came to the throne in 1127 and ruled for more than 30 years. He founded the dynasty of Smaliensk princes and established an independent bishopric there.



'Some of the Kryvičians went off up the Volga, the Dźvina and the Dnieper. Smaliensk is their town, too.' Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle



St Luke the Evangelist. 13th-century miniature from the Vorša Gospels, now kept in the Library of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences

Unlike most of the Russian territories, Smaliensk and the other old Belarusian principalities were never subjected to the Mongol-Tatar yoke; they managed to preserve their independence.

The Principality of Smaliensk in the 12th century



CHRONOLOGY

863 – Smaliensk is first mentioned in the chronicles

1130s – Principality of Smaliensk gains independence

1127–1159 – reign of Raścislaŭ in Smaliensk



Seal used by Manujil, Bishop of Smaliensk. Rubbing

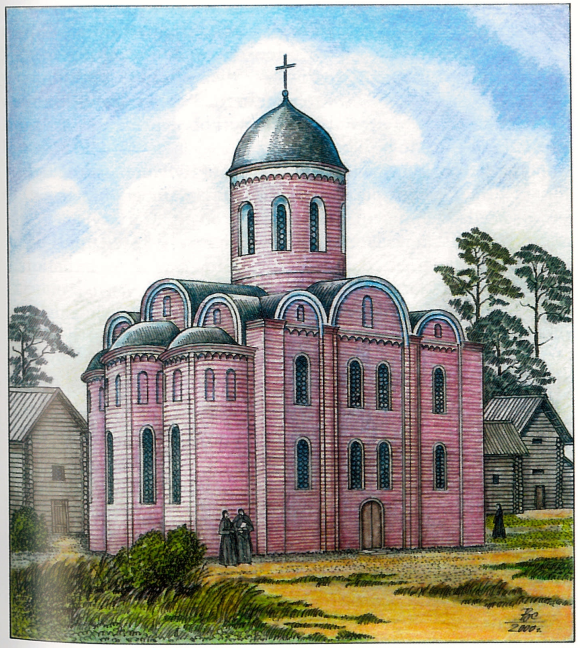


St Aŭram and St Mierkur of Smaliensk. Icon of the 1720s. Belarusian school

During the reign of Prince Raścislaŭ fortifications were built in Smaliensk; these included fortified churches, one of which – the Church of SS Peter and Paul – still stands. He established a centre of learning in the city; the level of knowledge imparted there was apparently so high that contemporaries referred to it as an academy.

Prince Raścislaŭ's policies were carried on by his son Raman. The chronicles tell us that, by the standards of the day, he collected a rich library. Following his father's example, he opened schools and invited foreign scholars to his state. Smaliensk became a major Belarusian cultural centre. It was there that the Smaliensk Chronicles were compiled. Klim Smaliacič was born there at the beginning of the 12th century; he went on to become the Metropolitan of Kyiv and one of the most highly educated men of his time. A pupil of his, Aŭram of Smaliensk, writer and propagator of learning, lived and worked in the city.

Church of SS Peter and Paul in Smaliensk. Artist's impression by Viktar Staščaniuk



The name of Mierkur, a native of Smaliensk, is forever associated with the victory over the Mongol-Tatars led by Batu Khan. It was Mierkur who commanded the Smaliensk forces that routed the invaders in 1238. These events are recorded by a contemporary in the *Tale of Mierkur of Smaliensk*. Mierkur himself perished in the battle. The Church declared him a saint, along with his fellow countryman Aŭram of Smaliensk.



Seal used by Prince Viačaslaŭ of Smaliensk



Small tin icon from Turaŭ. Obverse. 13th century

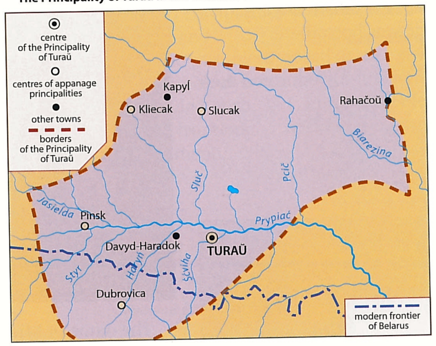
THE PRINCIPALITY OF TURAŬ

Nowadays Turaŭ is a small, quiet town in the south of Belarus. However, it was once a wealthy, splendid city with stone-built churches and monasteries, the capital of an independent principality.

The earliest mention of Turaŭ can be dated to 980.

By contrast to Polacak, Turaŭ at the beginning of its history recognised the suzerainty of Kyiv. At the end of the 10th century Prince Volodymyr of Kyiv placed his son Sviatopolk on the Turaŭ throne. Yaroslav the Wise of Kyiv continued to exert authority over Turaŭ. In the 11th century we find several princes of Turaŭ actually seated on the Kyiv throne, something that testifies to the importance of the city. A sure sign of Turaŭ's status at the beginning of the 11th century is the fact that it was the centre of a western rite bishopric headed by Bishop Reinbern, according to some researchers.

The Principality of Turaŭ in the 12th and first half of the 13th centuries



The chronicler made a note for future generations, 'Rahvalod came from over the sea and ruled in Polacak. Tur ruled in Turaŭ, that is how the people there got their name.' This means that by the 10th century there was yet another large state on Belarusian territory, the Principality of Turaŭ.

1097 was the year in which the chronicles first mentioned the city of Pinsk. It was founded on the banks of the river Pina at the point where it joins the river Prypiać. In less than a century Pinsk overtook Turaŭ in importance; this later gave reason for historians to refer to the Principality of Turaŭ and Pinsk.

In the 1120s the throne of Turaŭ came to be occupied by Prince Viačaslaŭ, who was the son of Volodymyr Monomach. He attempted to gain control of Kyiv but lost the fight. As a result the Principality of Turaŭ was temporarily deprived of a number of towns: Bieraście, Darahičyn (now also called Drahičyn), Kliecak, Rahačoŭ and Čartaryjsk.

On three separate occasions Viačaslaŭ was forced to leave Turaŭ, and three times he came back. After his death the city experienced a rapid turnover of princes – a situation that lasted until 1158, when Jury son of Jaraslaŭ ascended the throne. He was descended from an old Turaŭ family and wanted to rid the principality of its dependence on Kyiv. In this he enjoyed the powerful support of his subjects. Kyiv demanded that he submit to its authority, but Prince Jury refused to be a vassal. It was then that a huge army was mobilised against Turaŭ; allied with Kyiv were troops from Smaliensk, Halich, Luts'k and elsewhere. However the idea that it would be simple to capture Turaŭ proved quite wrong.

Iziaslaŭ son of Mstyslav, Prince of Turaŭ goes with his allies into battle against Prince Yaropolk of Kyiv in 1135. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle





Gold coins of Prince Volodymyr of Kyiv, found near Pinsk. Late 10th century

CHRONOLOGY

980 – Turaŭ is first mentioned in the chronicles
1019 – first mention of Bieraście in the chronicles
1097 – Pinsk is first mentioned in the chronicles
1158 – Principality of Turaŭ gains its independence



This is what Turaŭ may have looked like in olden times. Artists' impression by Piatro Lysienka and Jaŭhien Karobuškin

Small tin icon. Obverse. 13th century



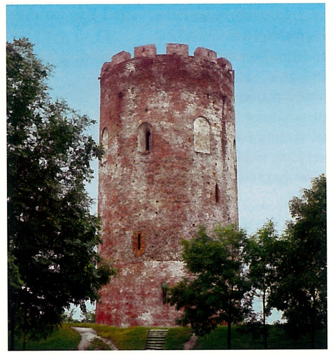
In 1162 the citizens of Turaŭ once again emerged victorious in the struggle against their neighbours. Kyiv reached a peace agreement with Turaŭ, officially recognising its independence.

The townsfolk transformed their city into an impregnable fortress. After a siege of ten weeks an outbreak of equine plague in the enemy camp forced the Kyiv troops and their allies to retreat. Pinsk also succeeded in fighting off an attack in the same year.

The victory that had been won thanks to the bravery of its citizens and the military skills of Prince Jury ensured the Principality's independence.

The old lands of Bieraście were in close alliance with Turaŭ. Apart from Bieraście itself, they included the towns of Kobryń, Kamieniec, Darahičyn, Bieĺsk and Mieĺnik. This territory formed part of the Principality of Volodymyr-in-Volhynia in the 12th and 13th centuries but had nevertheless managed to preserve a considerable degree of autonomy. It was during this period that the well-known tower in Kamieniec was built; it is sometimes erroneously referred to as the Bielaja Vieža (White Tower) in an attempt to provide an explanation for the name of the largest virgin forest in Belarus, called Bielaviežskaja.

Kamieniec Tower. Modern view





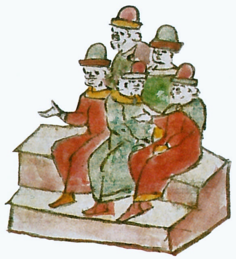
The princes of Kyiv by tradition strove to place their close relatives on the throne of Turaŭ. This miniature from the 11th-century *Codex Gertrudianus* depicts the son of Iziaslav of Kyiv, Prince Jarapolk of Turaŭ, at prayer with his family

Turaŭ on the river Prypiać. Lithograph after a watercolour by Napalieon Orda. Mid-19th century



THE PRINCE AND THE POPULAR ASSEMBLY





Citizens of Polacak holding peace talks with Davyd of Smaliensk, Mstislav of Novgorod, Vasiĺka of Lahojsk and Usiaslaŭ of Drucak. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle

The chronicles tell us that the prince's private corps (retinue) was divided into seniors, or the 'boyars', and juniors, or the 'young men' (*otraki*). The prince himself selected men for his corps, which then comprised warriors who were completely devoted to him. The 'levy in mass', summoning able-bodied men of whatever rank in society for military service, was the other vital part of the army.

The prince

The prince was the head of state. His primary duties included the collection of tribute from the people under his authority. He also examined court cases and dealt with the administration of the territory that he controlled. He was in charge of all matters related to dealings with other states and had the right to conclude peace agreements. The prince of Polacak distributed towns and the lands adjacent to them to his vassals.

First and foremost, however, the head of state was responsible for defending his realm against enemies. His chief duty was therefore to organise the armed forces and take command of them. For this purpose he maintained a stock of weapons and kept herds of horses.



Prince's family. From the *Compendium* of 1073

Figure of a musician carved in horn. 12th century. Novaharodak



The army

The prince had his own retinue, a corps of well-armed and trained men. They lived next to the prince's private quarters in the fortified centre of the town, called *dziadziniec* (which later developed into a castle). Their most important task was participation in military campaigns, guarding the state's frontiers and protecting the person of the prince.

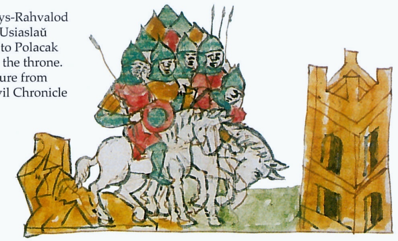
Lookout towers were built on high points along river banks and on hills; from there guards would keep watch day and night for approaching enemies. In the event of danger signal fires would be lit that could be seen from the next watchtower. The chain of fires would quickly reach the city, and the townsfolk would take up arms.

The main fighting force was the cavalry, made up of men from the prince's own retinue. Their weapons included spears, swords and huge shields. In close combat they used axes, maces and morningstars (clubs with spikes). The retinue carried such items as chain-mail, armour and helmets separately, putting them on only when danger threatened. They used to send out scouts ahead of the main force in order to capture someone who could give them information about the enemy.



Doing battle with Cumans. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle

Prince Barys-Rahvalod son of Usiaslaŭ rides off to Polacak to ascend the throne. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle



The Principality of Polacak had a form of government in which the popular assembly of citizens exercised authority alongside the prince.

The troops had a number of cunning ruses that could be put to use: ambush, feigned flight, false camps with bright fires. If it proved impossible to capture a town by head-on assault, the army would begin to lay siege. A palisade concealing archers would be constructed around the enemy fortifications. Under cover of volleys of arrows siege engines for lobbing stones would be brought up. The stones they threw could fly one-and-a-half times as far as an arrow. These catapults could also be positioned on castle walls which at that time were usually wooden.

All adult males gathered in the popular assembly to deal with the most important matters affecting the state and society. The Polacak assembly had the right to appoint princes. It was empowered to sign agreements with other cities and states on behalf of the prince and the bishop of Polacak.

The popular assembly (folkmoot, *vieča*)

Meetings of the popular assembly exerted control over the prince's actions and also served as a kind of Supreme Court. Proof of guilt was in most cases left to 'divine justice'. It was thought that God himself punishes the guilty and protects the innocent. In order to prove their case suspects would quite often have to hold their hand over an open flame or undergo other harsh trials.

The popular assembly of Polacak became especially powerful in the second half of the 12th century. On several occasions the citizens of Polacak invited princes to take the throne and rule over them, only subsequently to strip them of their authority and drive them out of the city. After the reign of Usiaslaŭ the Sorcerer the princes of Polacak no longer lived in the *dziadziniec* by the Cathedral of St Sophia, but in Bielčycy, their residence on the other side of the river Dźvina.

It emerges from the chronicles that true authority in Polacak belonged to 30 elders. We may conclude from this that for some period of time the Principality of Polacak was a feudal republic with an elected monarch.



12th-century Belarusian princess. Artist's impression by Alieś Puškin



Silver ingots were used to settle large accounts

FEUDAL DISINTEGRATION



Decorated item of bone found during archaeological excavations in Vaŭkavysk Castle. 12th–13th centuries

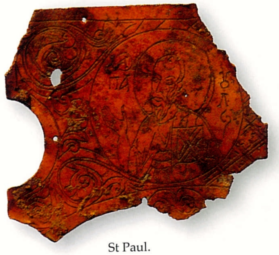
The break-up of large feudal states into smaller ones was a historical phenomenon that affected the whole of Europe. Belarus was no exception.

The economic ties between different regions of even the same principality in those days were weak. A natural economy formed the basis of such barter trading as there was. At the same time local lords were beginning to concentrate massive tracts of land in their hands. These large-scale landholdings were the main cause of the disintegration. Another important contributory factor was the increasing importance of towns.

It had become a tradition in Polacak and other principalities of the time for the ruling prince to apportion shares in his inheritance to his sons by appointing them as his lieutenants in individual towns and districts. This was the way in which small appanage principalities came into existence and then acquired an increasing measure of independence.

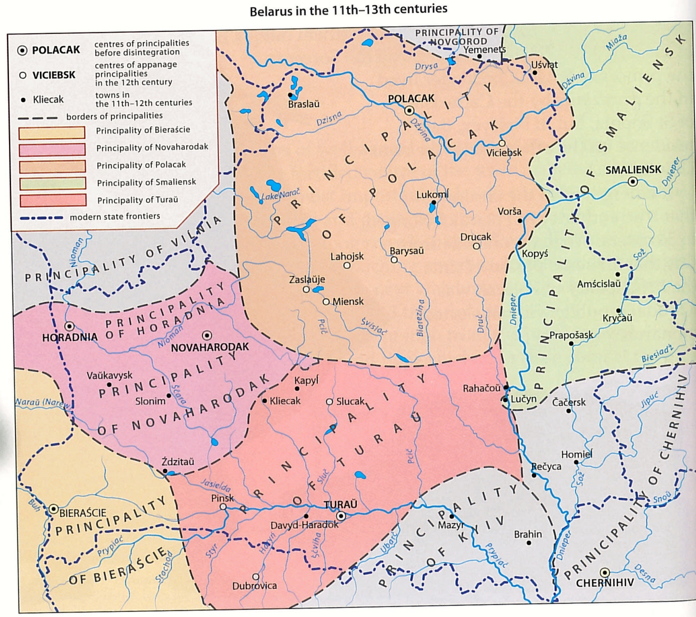
The Principality of Polacak had already begun to break up into smaller states during the reign of Usiaslaŭ the Sorcerer. He had six sons and he gave each one a town together with the surrounding territory. In his lifetime Usiaslaŭ retained complete control over the entire Polacak territory, but after his death the Principalities of Miensk and Zaslaŭje gained complete independence in the middle of the 12th century. The Principalities of Viciebsk, Lahojsk and Drucak followed suit. In their dealings with other states Usiaslaŭ's heirs acted in unison, but when it came to settling 'family' matters their interests often clashed and then brother would take up arms against brother.

It was historically inevitable that large feudal states would disintegrate into smaller ones. The Principality of Polacak was the first to set off down the road of disintegration; it had already reached the highest point of its economic and cultural development.



St Paul. 12th-century engraving on copper. Horadnia

Belarus in the 11th–13th centuries





Decorative inlay from quiver found in Lukomĺ. Etched bone

We know from the chronicles about how Prince Rahvalod-Vasiĺ of Polacak went to war against Raścislaŭ son of Hlieb, Prince of Miensk. Raścislaŭ had taken the throne of Polacak with the help of the popular assembly, but eight years later Rahvalod was able to win the city back. In 1162 the clash between Rahvalod and the then Prince of Miensk Valadar took a heavy toll in human life.

A similar process was under way in the Principality of Turaŭ. Jury son of Jaraslaŭ had won the Principality's independence from Kyiv, but his sons witnessed its disintegration. Smaller principalities, such as those of Kliecak and Slucak, broke away from Turaŭ. The largest one to do so was the Principality of Pinsk. This city had already begun to develop more rapidly than Turaŭ and was later destined to play an important historical role.



Prince Sviatopolk of Kyiv captures Prince Jaraslaŭ of Bieraście. Prince Jaraslaŭ swears an oath before the relics of SS Borys and Hlib in Kyiv. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle

The towns of Amścislaŭ, Kryčaŭ, Prapošask, Taropiec, Roslaŭ, Darahabuž and Jeĺnia all belonged to the Principality of Smaliensk; like the Principality of Polacak, it had been founded by the Kryvičians and occupied territory on the upper reaches of the Dźvina and Dnieper rivers.

To the south-east of Polacak lay the Principality of Chernihiv. In the second half of the 11th century it incorporated the towns of Čačersk, Homiel and Rečyca on the river Sož. Homieĺ, however, soon broke away and became the capital of a quite powerful independent principality.

In the 12th and 13th centuries separate principalities were established along the river Nioman in Vaŭkavysk, Novaharodak and Śvislač. The Principality of Novaharodak was rapidly growing richer and eventually came to dominate the others. It was situated on fertile land and on both the east and west sides was well protected against enemy attacks. This greatly assisted the development of agriculture, crafts and trade. Opportunities opened up for Novaharodak to bring the surrounding territories into union with it.



Chess was already a very popular game. This chess piece is a *fierź* ('queen' in English terminology). It was fashioned out of deer or elk horn by a mediaeval craftsman from Vaŭkavysk 900 years ago



Viščyn hoard, containing money and domestic items, discovered in 1979 in the Rahačoŭ district. It was buried 800 years ago

PEASANTS AND LORDS



12th-century gold temple ring from an excavated site at Stara-Barysaŭ

Girl's adornments of the 12th century. Artist's impression by Alieś Puškin based on archaeological finds



The earliest form of human society based on the life of the community as a whole was gradually receding into oblivion. It was being replaced by a slave-owning society. Slaves were captives seized in war. The Eastern Slavs traded slaves like goods. Many of them were sent to Byzantium to be sold.

Slave labour came free, but when compared with the labour of a freeman it was extremely unproductive.

Once property had become the mark of social division, the relations between those who possessed wealth and authority and those who did not were determined first and foremost by the collection of tribute. At first tribute was taken from those who had been defeated in war; it resembled the payment of ransom.

The 11th-century Byzantine historian Constantine Porphyrogennitos, when writing about the Kryvičians and Dryhavičans, tells us that their princes would set off every year around their territory exacting tribute. Their peasant subjects paid the tribute in furs, honey, wax, grain and other products.

Slave ownership was not as developed in the lands of Belarus as it had been in Egypt, Greece or Rome. In the 11th and 12th centuries in Eastern Europe slave ownership existed alongside the new feudal system.



These items are more than 1,000 years old. They were found in a site on the banks of the river Mienka. Top right there is a chess piece (knight), and at the bottom a depiction of the minor pagan god Jaščur

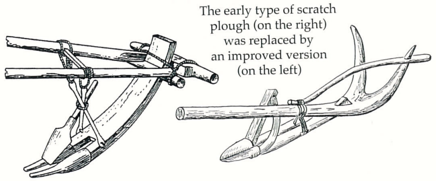
Later the peasants started to take tribute payments to specially appointed places where the prince would examine complaints, administer justice and punish the guilty.

The tribute was a tax in kind.

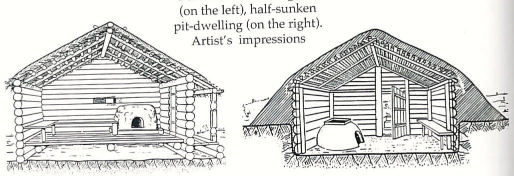
The beginnings of feudalism wrought huge changes in rural life. A manorial system developed, with villages belonging either to the prince or his lords (boyars).

At the centre of the manor was a well-fortified feudal court, quite often dominated by a wooden tower. The master – prince or boyar – lived in a manor house equipped with cellars for storing food and mead, a smithy, barns and other outbuildings.

Feudal lords owned villages which they could freely give away, exchange or bequeath. We know, for example, that the widow of Prince Hlieb of Miensk endowed the Kyiv Monastery of the Caves with five villages and their inhabitants.



The early type of scratch plough (on the right) was replaced by an improved version (on the left)



Peasants' homes: log hut (on the left), half-sunken pit-dwelling (on the right). Artist's impressions



Stone whorls for spindles, glass and cornelian beads



Manor house for landowner of the 12th–13th centuries. Artist's impression by Viktar Staščaniuk

Dependent peasants were called *čeliadź* (villeins, thralls or serfs). There was a special class of serfs who had completely lost their personal liberty; the term for them was *chalop* (boy). To all intents and purposes they were bonded slaves. The chronicles also use the word *śmierd* to refer to serfs; it is related to words meaning 'stink'.

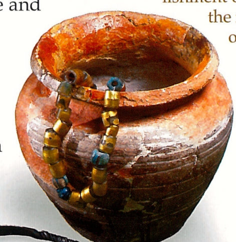
A freeman who took a loan from the feudal lord in a year when the harvest failed acquired vassal status as a serf.

Slash-and-burn cultivation of the land was being replaced by the more advanced method of arable farming. The people of the time sowed rye, barley, wheat, oats, buckwheat, peas and flax. Cabbages, turnips, beans, poppies, onions and garlic grew in vegetable patches. Everyone, whether they lived in the towns or in the countryside, knew the taste of dill and salted cucumbers. Horses were used to plough the land. Pigs grunted in the barns, sheep and goats bleated, streams of fresh milk splashed into wooden buckets at milking time.

Fishing, hunting and beekeeping retained their importance in the rural economy. Men went hunting for meat (bison, aurochs, elk, deer, bears, swans, geese and grouse) and for fur (beavers, foxes, squirrels, wolves, sable and marten). Fish were caught with nets, traps, hooks and leisters. When the fish were spawning small streams would be partially blocked with wooden stakes; a wicker trap would be set by the open passage.

Hollowed-out tree trunks were placed in the forests to serve as hives for wild bees. A good year would yield several large pots of honey which was then widely used in cooking and making drinks, some of them strong. Goblets of fermented mead would be passed round the table at festive meals. The seventh cup of this strong drink was said to 'make God angry', and it was therefore the last, so as not to overstep the limit.

At that time most peasants still enjoyed personal liberty within the communal structure of rural society. The chroniclers referred to them simply as *ludzi* or *ludziny* (folk). However, the status of the 'folk' was gradually changing. In ever greater numbers they in one way or another came to depend on a feudal lord. With the establishment of the state the number of dependent peasants grew inexorably.





Bracelets were a very popular ornament for several centuries. Copper. 12th century



Old chess piece from Viciebsk. Bone. 13th century



Belarus holds first place in Europe for the number of unearthed hoards of items dating back to mediaeval times. This is the result of the numerous wars and armed conflicts that have been fought on its territory. This 11th-century hoard of coins and other items was found in the village of Haraŭliany, Hlybokaje district

URBAN SETTLEMENTS BETWEEN THE 10TH AND THE 13TH CENTURIES



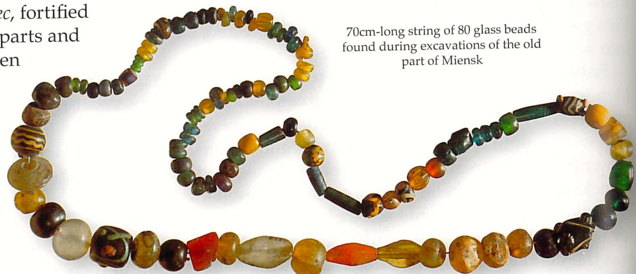
Building a church. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle

Early Belarusian towns grew out of old *haradzišča*, which were originally surrounded by strong palisades. The Belarusian word for 'town' (*horad*) is related to the verb *haradzić*, meaning 'to put a fence around something'.

The oldest Belarusian towns often took their names from the rivers on which they were built, *eg* Polacak from the Palata, Viciebsk from the Vićba, Pinsk from the Pina, Viĺnia (Wilno, Vilnius) from the river Viĺnia.

From the chronicles we learn that on the territory of Belarus in this period there were already more than 30 towns. Polacak and Smaliensk were joined by Turaŭ, Zaslaŭje and Viciebsk in the 10th century. The next century saw the foundation of Bieraście, Novaharodak, Miensk, Viĺnia, Lukomĺ, Drucak, Vorša, Taropiec, Lahojsk, Kopyś, Braslaŭ, Pinsk and Staradub. Slucak, Kliecak, Barysaŭ, Prapošasк, Kryčaŭ, Bransk (Briansk), Roslaŭ, Homieĺ, Brahin, Rahačoŭ, Čačersk, Darahabuž, Horadnia, Amścislaŭ and Mazyr all date back to the 12th century. Mahilioŭ, Kapyĺ, Slonim, Kobryń, Kamieniec, Vaŭkavysk and Rečyca are known to have come into existence in the 13th century. The towns of the time were predominantly wooden and consisted of two main sections. The prince, his retinue and the most important and wealthy citizens lived in the *dziadziniec*, fortified by a ditch, ramparts and walls. Tradesmen and craftsmen settled next to the *dzia-dziniec*. This part of town was known as the *pasad* (outer ward).

The population of the towns was predominantly made up of artisans and merchants. This explains why towns were built on sites that were convenient for trade and craft work: on riverbanks, at points where rivers joined, at crossroads and river crossings.



70cm-long string of 80 glass beads found during excavations of the old part of Miensk

CHRONOLOGY

First mention of Belarusian towns in the chronicles:

974 – Viciebsk
985 – Zaslaŭje
1019 – Bieraście
1044 – Novaharodak
1065 – Braslaŭ
1067 – Miensk, Vorša
1070 – Viĺnia
1078 – Lahojsk
1102 – Barysaŭ
1116 – Slucak
1127 – Horadnia
1142 – Homieĺ
1155 – Mazyr
1156 – Amścislaŭ
1252 – Slonim, Vaŭkavysk
1267 – Mahilioŭ



Archaeological digs have uncovered the remains of early wooden buildings in Bieraście. 12th–14th centuries



Ornaments worn by wealthy townswoman. Artist's impression by Alieś Puškin

The prince's dwelling could have two storeys, with a wide entrance gate and gallery, chambers for the women, sleeping quarters and a hall where no fewer than a hundred guests could sit down to table.

Ordinary townsfolk lived in cramped log-built houses. The frame of the house rested on a wooden underlay; earth would frequently be piled up against the walls to form a kind of ledge with the aim of keeping the warmth in. The floors were laid with boards. The houses were heated by open fires; there was no chimney. Houses stood very close together. The town streets were extremely narrow, around three metres in width. They were paved with logs and planks.

The economic heart of the town was the market place, usually situated on the river bank not far from the *dziadziniec* (castle). The civic heart of the main town of a principality was the square where the popular assembly met. As a rule, it was situated close to the main church of the town.

Old Slavonic town. Artist's impression





Fragment of glass goblet, painted in gold. 11th century. Novaharodak



The owner of this leather purse lived 800 years ago in the Horadnia area



Troops of Iziaslav son of Mstyslav, Prince of Kursk, before the walls of Lahojsk. 1127. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle



Key, knife, rings and buckle found in a *haradzišča* near Miensk. 11th–12th centuries



Ornaments worn by a wealthy townswoman. Artist's impression by Alieś Puškin



12th-century gold bracelet with dragon heads. Miensk castle hill

We can get some idea of what towns would have looked like at the time from excavations that have been carried out in Bieraście. Archaeologists have uncovered three streets and several wooden constructions about 700 years old. One of these buildings was found nearly intact, right up to the roof.

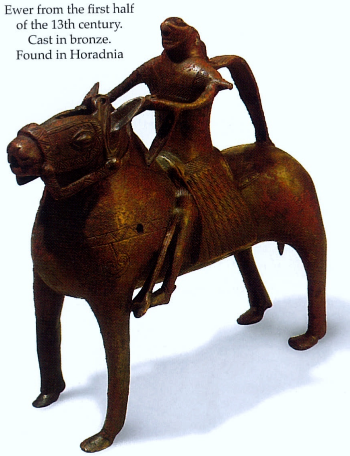
Old Belarusian towns were busy craft centres. Archaeologists reckon that artisans specialising in more than 60 different crafts were active in Polacak, *eg* potters, coopers, cobblers, tailors, locksmiths, weavers, copper-workers, tanners and curriers. There were carpenters who could build and maintain the town walls or build river-going vessels. Stonemasons hewed millstones out of burr-stone and whetstones out of sandstone.



The frequent wars of the time compelled the inhabitants of Belarus to conceal their wealth



This is how the oldest Cathedral of St Sophia in Polacak would have looked. Arist's impression by Viktar Staščaniuk



Ewer from the first half of the 13th century. Cast in bronze. Found in Horadnia



Beads. Glass, crystal, cornelian. 11th–12th centuries. Found in the village of Bracianka, Navahradak district



Allegorical depiction of the 1092 plague in Polacak. Devils on horseback attack the townspeople. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle

From softer types of stone they could fashion small icons and crucifixes. Bone-carvers produced combs, decorative inlays for quivers, buttons and chess pieces. The fame of the Polacak jewellers had spread far and wide. Armourers were held in particularly high esteem. The fact that an arrow made by a master fletcher could easily pierce a finger-thick oak plank, even after a flight of 100 metres, gives some idea of their skills.

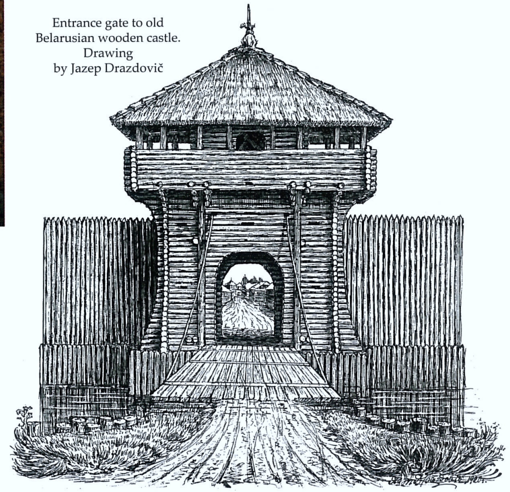
Towns traded with each other. Merchants did business not only with neighbouring towns but also with distant regions such as Byzantium and the Middle East. Wine and olive oil were imported from these areas in amphoras. Wealthy townspeople would stop by the market stalls selling brightly coloured and patterned cloth from Byzantium, oriental spices and fine glass tableware. Artisans acquired lead, copper and tin from Western Europe. Salt was for several centuries one of the most important imported goods. The most common exports from what is now Belarus were furs, honey, wax, coal and resin. Later on grain and iron were added to the list.



Silver ingots dating back to the times of the old Belarusian principalities



Townspeople's leather footwear



Entrance gate to old Belarusian wooden castle. Drawing by Jazep Drazdovič

ST EŬFRASIŃNIA OF POLACAK



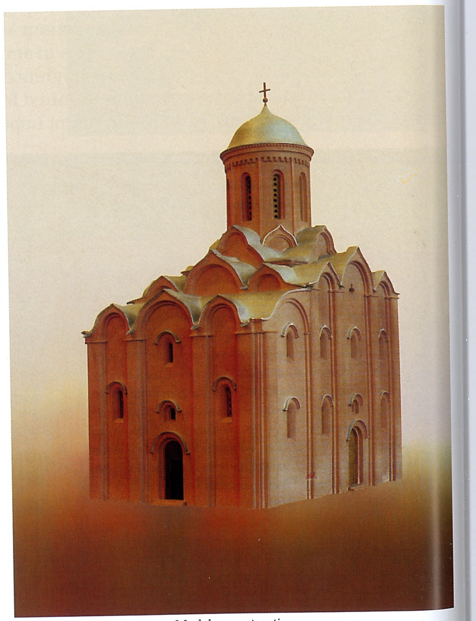
St Eŭfrasińnia of Polacak, Protectress of Belarus. 19th-century fresco

The baby girl born to the Polacak ruling family in around 1104 was given the ancient name of Pradslava, a name long associated with the city. Her father was Śviataslaŭ-Hieorhi, Usiaslaŭ the Sorcerer's youngest son.

From a very early age Usiaslaŭ's granddaughter amazed all who saw her with her beauty and thirst for learning. In those days childhood did not last long: she would have been regarded as marriageable at the age of twelve. Her parents were already preparing to marry her off to one of the young princes who were sending matchmakers to Polacak. The girl, however, had chosen a different path.

In order to devote her life to spiritual perfection, Pradslava entered a convent and adopted the name of Eŭfrasińnia. She took her monastic vows without telling her parents.

'Her mind was filled with the Holy Spirit,' says her contemporary, the author of the *Vita* of St Eŭfrasińnia, 'and she said to herself, "What have the generations that came before us actually achieved? They married, they ruled, but they did not live for ever; their lives passed by, their glory perished like dust... whereas women who cut off the pleasures of the flesh with the Sword of the Spirit are the ones who are remembered on earth."'



Model reconstruction of the Polacak Church of the Holy Saviour, built at the command of Abbess Eŭfrasińnia in the mid-12th century

CHRONOLOGY

1104 – birth of Pradslava-Eŭfrasińnia

1116 – Pradslava takes her vows as a nun and adopts the name of Eŭfrasińnia

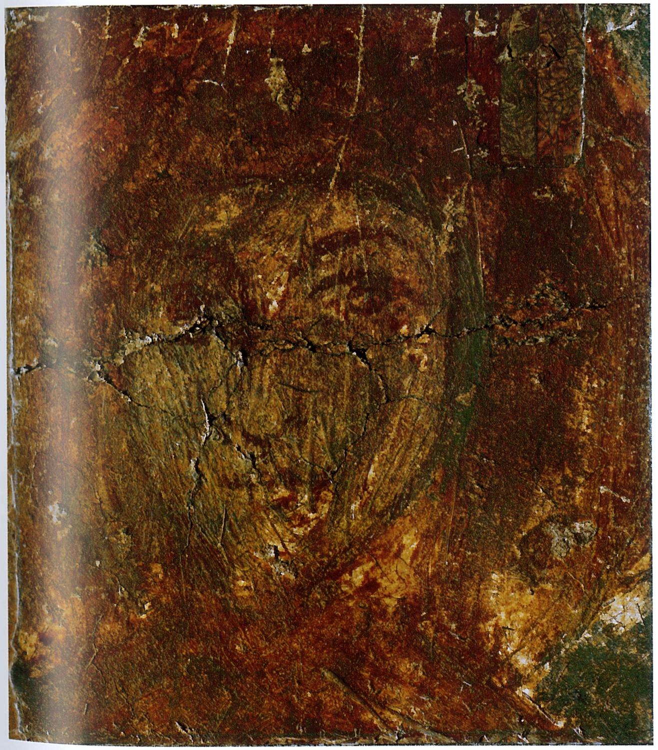
1167 – Eŭfrasińnia undertakes a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and dies in Jerusalem

1910 – St Eŭfrasińnia's relics are returned to Polacak

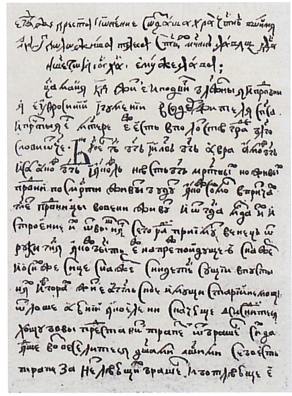


Polacak icon of the Mother of God Hodegetria. 12th century. This icon, brought to Polacak from Byzantium for Abbess Eŭfrasińnia, came to exert a powerful influence on the artistic traditions of the Belarusian school of icon painting

Inside the convent Eŭfrasińnia gave herself wholly to books; in this way she became one of the most learned women in Europe at the time. Apart from the Bible she read the works of Roman and Byzantine theologians and of Cyril and Methodius, the 'Apostles to the Slavs'. She studied Nestor's *Tale of bygone years* (the Primary Chronicle of the Eastern Slavs) and the Byzantine chronicles which gave her a view of world history. Some historians believe that her study of philosophy may have included the works of Aristotle and Plato.



12th-century fresco, sometimes called 'Portrait of St Eŭfrasińnia'. Church of the Holy Saviour in Polacak



Page from the *Vita* of Eŭfrasińnia of Polacak. 17th-century manuscript

Jerusalem.
Engraving
by Erhard Reuwich
from Bernhard
von Beydenbach's
Peregrinatio in terram sanctam
(Pilgrimage to the Holy Land)
Mainz. 1486



The spread of the written word was given great impetus when Eŭfrasińnia founded a convent, and subsequently a monastery, in Polacak. Special book-copying workshops (*scriptoria*) were established in them. When she became abbess of her convent she opened schools for the young citizens of Polacak, where they were taught Church Slavonic, Latin and Greek, and were also given lessons in science and medicine. The most gifted also received training in poetics and rhetoric. Special importance was attached to history.

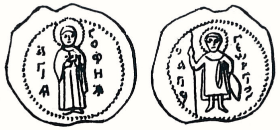
Plan
of Constantinople.
Mediaeval engraving



Blessed Eŭfrasińnia,
Abbess of Polacak.
19th-century engraving
based on a much earlier icon



Some years later the Bishop of Polacak gave Eŭfrasińnia permission to retreat to a cell in the Cathedral of St Sophia, where – according to her *Vita* – she 'began to write books with her own hands'. The work of a book copyist was at that time so physically demanding that only men had previously undertaken it. She copied church books, chronicles and the collections of aphorisms that were so popular in those days. She may also have contributed to the writing of the Polacak Chronicle. Eŭfrasińnia also wrote works of her own, such as prayers and instructional texts, as well as translated from Greek and Latin.



Seal used
by Eŭfrasińnia's parents,
Prince Śviataslaŭ-Hieorhi
and Princess Safija.
Rubbing.
Obverse and reverse



Seal used by Abbess Eŭfrasińnia.
Obverse and reverse

Polacak. Convent
of the Holy Saviour
and St Eŭfrasińnia.
Early 20th-century
postcard

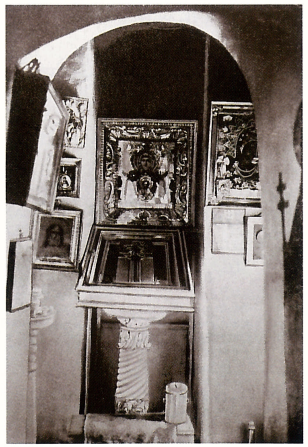


Eŭfrasińnia was tireless in surrounding herself with talent. In effect she was the first Belarusian patron of the arts. It was at her request that in the 1150s the Polacak master mason Iaan raised the Church of the Holy Saviour in 30 weeks. This masterpiece of the Polacak architectural school still stands. By now abbess of her convent, Eŭfrasińnia ordered the unique frescoes to be painted on the walls of the Church of the Holy Saviour. From the master jeweller Lazar Bohša she ordered the famous Cross that has since become a national symbol for Belarus.

Vita of St Euphrosyne of Alexandria.
12th-century fresco on the wall
of Eŭfrasińnia's private prayer
chapel in the Polacak Church
of the Holy Saviour



St Eŭfrasińnia's cell built into the wall
of the Church of the Holy Saviour.
Early 20th-century photograph



Her name is linked to the arrival in Belarus of the priceless icon of the Mother of God Hodegetria from Byzantium. Tradition has it that the icon was painted by St Luke the Evangelist himself.

Kyiv bids farewell to the relics of the Protectress of Belarus. April 1910





Silver reliquary containing the relics of St Eŭfrasińnia in the Polacak Church of the Holy Saviour. Photograph of the 1910s

St Eŭfrasińnia. 19th-century icon from the Polacak Cathedral of the Epiphany



Eŭfrasińnia strove to make peace and put an end to the internecine feuding between the descendants of Rahvalod. She is remembered as a peacemaker in 12th-century hymns composed in her honour, 'You, like a double-edged sword, forbade the brother princes to dare take up arms one against the other.'

Eŭfrasińnia was the first East Slav woman to be canonised by the Orthodox Church. The Catholic Church also has a long tradition of regarding her as a saint. She is venerated as the heavenly intercessor for Belarus.



Solemn procession bearing the relics of St Eŭfrasińnia starts out from the Cathedral of St Nicholas for the Convent of the Holy Saviour. Polacak. May 1910

Monument to Eŭfrasińnia in Polacak by Ihar Holubieŭ. 2000



Entrance to St Eŭfrasińnia's cell. Early 20th-century photograph





Reliquary containing St Eŭfrasińnia's relics in the Church of the Holy Saviour. Modern photograph

Heirmologion (a book of canons usually sung at matins). 16th-century manuscript



Towards the end of her life Eŭfrasińnia made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. It was there that she died in 1167. She was buried in Jerusalem in the Convent of the Holy Virgin of Theodosius. 20 years later her relics were translated to the Kyiv Monastery of the Caves. From there they were returned in 1910 to the Convent of the Holy Saviour in Polacak that she herself had founded. They remain there to this day.

St Eŭfrasińnia is commemorated every year on 5 June according to the Gregorian calendar.

ST KIRYLA OF TURAŬ

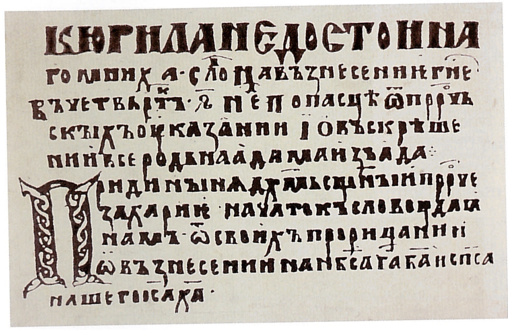


Depiction of an archer on a draughts piece. 12th century. Turaŭ

This famous son of Belarus was born in the ancient city of Turaŭ. At the time it was the capital of a powerful principality and one of the main centres of learning in the Eastern Slavonic world. Its rich libraries held the oldest book known to have been produced in Belarus, the 11th-century Turaŭ Gospels.



St Kiryla of Turaŭ. Late 19th-century icon



Opening lines of St Kiryla's *Homily for the feast of the Ascension*

The *Vita* of St Kiryla of Turaŭ gives little by way of detail about his birth and death. We know that he was the son of wealthy parents, and that 'wealth' and 'the passing glories of this world' held no attraction for him.

Locked away in his tall wooden tower on the banks of the river Prypiać, the young monk spent his days praying and writing. From his pen flowed inspirational tales, homilies, parables, letters and teachings. Fame as a writer came to Kiryla even at this early stage. His works were copied, read and memorised in all the East Slavonic principalities.



Iziaslav son of Mstyslav, Prince of Kyiv, despatches his vassals to Turaŭ and then receives the captive *pasadniki* (lieutenants) of Turaŭ. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle

He was educated to a high standard both in his parents' home and in the local episcopal monastery, acquiring knowledge of both the Byzantine and Roman worlds. There are grounds for believing that he studied in Kyiv. The *Vita* informs us that he 'became well-versed in the study of holy books'.

CHRONOLOGY

c 1130 – birth of Kiryla of Turaŭ

c 1161 – Kiryla is consecrated Bishop of Turaŭ

after 1190 – death of Kiryla

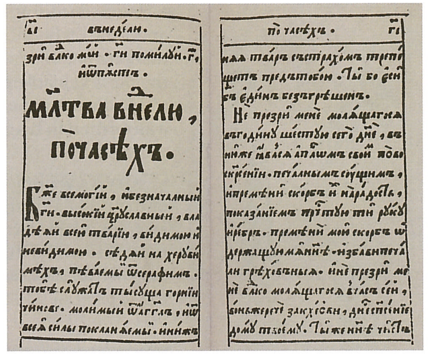


Kiryla of Turaŭ. Lithograph by Piatro Dračoŭ



Mother of God from Pinsk. Rubbing taken from small bronze icon of the 12th century

His desire to gain greater insight into the Holy Scriptures strengthened him in his resolve to take monastic vows. Once he had taken this step he set about preaching the Word of God through the composition of homilies. His thorough knowledge of Greek writers contributed to the success of his first literary efforts.



Pages from the *Daily prayers* with a prayer by Kiryla of Turaŭ. Vilnia. Early 17th century

Even while still young he became widely known for his education, eloquence and righteous life. But in his soul he sought more: he 'shut himself away in a tower and there laboured mightily with fasting and prayer, interpreting the Holy Scripture'.

The eulogy in honour of Kiryla of Turaŭ composed by his contemporaries refers to him as the second Chrysostom, the one who 'more than any other had come to shine on Rus''. By the beginning of the 13th century Kiryla was already being venerated as a saint.

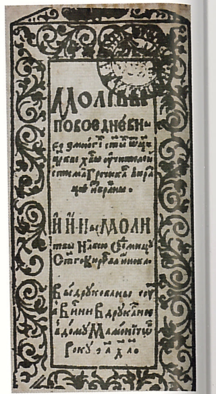
Kiryla is therefore the first monk in the Eastern Slavonic world to have become a 'stylite'. By rejecting the vanity of the world Christian stylites sought to mortify the flesh and perfect the soul.

We read in the *Vita* that 'he was famed throughout the land, and at the entreaties of the prince and people of the city the Metropolitan appointed him Bishop of Turaŭ'.

Kiryla came down from his tower and in about 1159 was elected to the episcopal see by the Turaŭ popular assembly and by Prince Jury. The solemn consecration (chirotony) took place in about 1161.

In his declining years Kiryla returned to the monastery and lived 'at St Nicholas' in Turaŭ'. It was there that, not long before his death, he composed his verse prayers, the most valuable part of his literary heritage.

He died in about 1190. Some decades later a eulogy was written in his honour.



Daily prayers. This book, containing prayers by St Kiryla, was published in 1601 at the Mamonič brothers' printing shop in Vilnia. It is now in the Bodleian Library in Oxford



Icon of St Kiryla of Turaŭ from the Belarusian Orthodox Church in Richmond Hill, New York

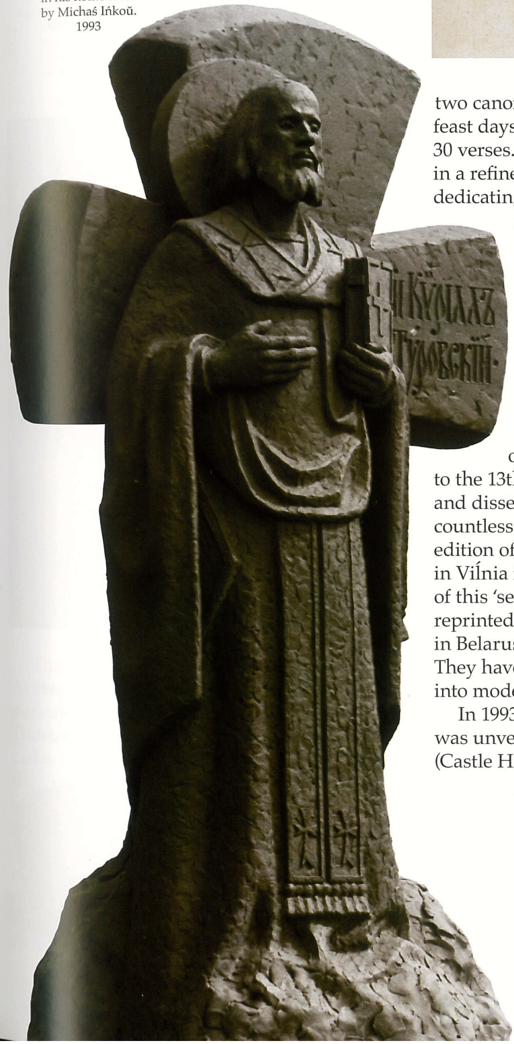
Kiryla's writings still amaze the reader even today with the richness of their imagery and their deep meaning. They are permeated with a profound concern for the spiritual well-being of his fellow countrymen. The works that have survived include eight homilies, some instructive tales, such as the *Tale of the white-robed clericand monasticism*, the *Sermon on the black-robed clergy*, the *Parable of the soul and the body*,



Belarusian Orthodox Church of St Kiryla of Turaŭ in New York



Prince Viačaslaŭ son of Volodymyr departs for Turaŭ to take the throne there, against the wishes of Prince Yaropolk of Kyiv. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle



Monument to Kiryla of Turaŭ in his home town by Michaś Iŕkoŭ. 1993

two canons (special hymns honouring feast days or saints) and about 30 verses. He wrote his homilies in a refined Church Slavonic, dedicating them to various Christian festivals, eg *Homily for Palm Sunday*, *Homily for Easter Sunday* and *Homily for the feast of the Ascension*. Verse prayers were written for every day of the week and were recited after morning, afternoon and evening services. The oldest surviving manuscript copy of Kiryla's prayers dates back to the 13th century. They were copied and disseminated in manuscript form countless times. The first printed edition of the prayers appeared in Vilnia in 1596. After that the works of this 'second Chrysostom' were reprinted on numerous occasions in Belarus, Ukraine and Muscovy. They have recently been translated into modern Belarusian.

In 1993 a monument to St Kiryla was unveiled on Zamkavaja Hara (Castle Hill) in Turaŭ.

This is a translation of St Kiryla's prayer from the original language in which he wrote his masterpieces:

I bless your most pure name,
O Mother of God.
Accept this offering
of words from
my sinful lips.
Do not reject
the entreaties
of Your servant,
Renew my soul
with repentance
That my soul
shall be saved.

THE CULTURE OF OLD BELARUS



Chess piece, in Belarusian called *ladździa* ('boat', here carved as a vessel with warriors; the English equivalent is 'rook' or 'castle'). Stone. Early 12th century. Vaŭkavysk

Architecture and frescoes

Among the great cultural achievements of the time in Belarus are stone and brick buildings, most of them churches. The oldest of them is reckoned to be the Cathedral of St Sophia in Polacak.

The interior of the multi-cupola cathedral was covered with frescoes which would have seized the attention of the faithful by the variety of their subject matter and their inimitable beauty.

The magnificent Cathedral of St Sophia in Polacak was erected in the second half of the 1050s. It was the third church with this dedication in the East Slavonic lands; the others were in Kyiv and Novgorod.



This is how the artist Napalieon Orda saw Kamieniec Tower. Mid-19th century lithograph

The Belarusian principalities of the 12th and 13th centuries were in no way inferior to the neighbouring European states in their level of education, book production, architecture and other areas of culture.

In the course of the 12th century ten stone churches were built in Polacak alone. The one that stands out the most is the Church of the Holy Saviour, built by the master mason Iaan to St Eŭfrasińnia's order; it is now regarded as the supreme achievement of the Polacak architectural school. The original interior frescoes have survived almost intact; they still have the power to move the visitor with their spirituality and rich range of colour.



Stone slab with depiction of a lion. 12th century. Vaŭkavysk

CHRONOLOGY

Early 12th century – birth of Klim Smaliacič

1150s – Church of the Holy Saviour (also referred to as St Eŭfrasińnia's Church of the Holy Saviour) in Polacak built

1161 – master jeweller Lazar Bohša makes the Cross of Eŭfrasińnia of Polacak

c 1186 – *Lay of Prince Igor's campaign* is composed



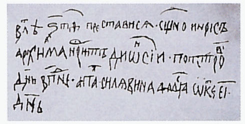
Christ Pantocrator and the Mother of God. Detail from 12th-century fresco in the private chapel of St Eŭfrasińnia. Church of the Holy Saviour in Polacak



Fragment of 12th-century Polacak fresco



Church of the Holy Saviour. Built by the master mason Iaan in the mid-12th century, it marked a high point in the development of the Polacak school of architecture. Photograph of 2008



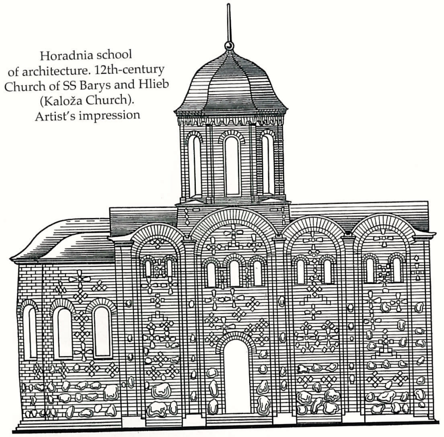
Example of the graffiti preserved in the Church of the Holy Saviour in the Convent of the Holy Saviour and St Eŭfrasińnia



Oldest depiction of the Church of the Holy Saviour in Polacak. From 12th-century fresco uncovered during restoration work in the church in 2000

The most impressive of the frescoes are those that depict women. Art historians believe that the painters must have been inspired by real persons, primarily Abbess Eŭfrasińnia and the sisters of her convent. The artists who worked on the frescoes in the equivalent Novgorod and Kyiv cathedrals did not dare produce such lifelike portrayals. The one that leaves the greatest impression is to be found on the carved pillar in the north-west of the church that supports the choir. The face, with its arched eyebrows and penetrating eyes, is rendered in a particularly convincing and lifelike manner. When looking at it you cannot stop yourself thinking that a real woman who actually lived here on Earth is standing in front of you. Her firm gaze seems to penetrate right into you, asking you directly: are you worthy of your ancestors, what do you think is the purpose of your life? It is thought that this fresco may well be a portrait of Eŭfrasińnia herself.

Horadnia school of architecture. 12th-century Church of SS Barys and Hlieb (Kaloža Church). Artist's impression



Another school of architecture developed in Horadnia. The 12th-century church of SS Barys and Hlieb (also known as Kaloža Church) still stands, much of it reconstructed, on the steep bank of the river Nioman.



Fragment of decoration on the side wall of Kaloža Church in Horadnia



Kaloža Church. Lithograph after a watercolour by Napalieon Orda. Mid-19th century



12th-century jug of the type that was set into the walls of churches and other buildings to act as resonators and so improve the acoustics

Its original walls have partially survived; they are decorated with glazed ceramic tiles and inlaid with polychrome polished stones.

Stone churches were also erected in Turaŭ, Novaharodak, Viciebsk and other Belarusian towns. A fortified defensive tower was built in Kamieniec in the 13th century. 30 metres tall, with an exterior diameter of more than 13 metres and 2.5-metre-thick walls, it is an important monument of the military architecture of the time. The tower's five levels could accommodate quite a sizeable garrison.



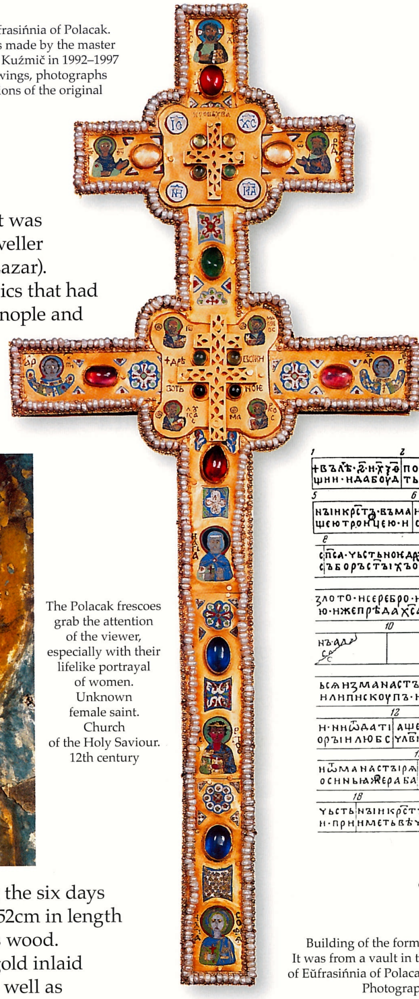
12th-century glass goblet and flask from Novaharodak. Replicas of archaeological finds



Stone chess piece (Belarusian *ladździa* – 'boat', corresponding to English 'castle') of the 12th or 13th centuries. It provides yet more evidence of the extent to which this demanding intellectual game had spread throughout old Belarus

The Cross of St Eŭfrasińnia of Polacak

This masterpiece of old Belarusian art was created in 1161 by the Polacak master jeweller Bohša (after baptism he took the name Lazar). It was designed to hold the Christian relics that had been sent to Eŭfrasińnia from Constantinople and Jerusalem. She presented the cross to the church of the convent that she had founded.

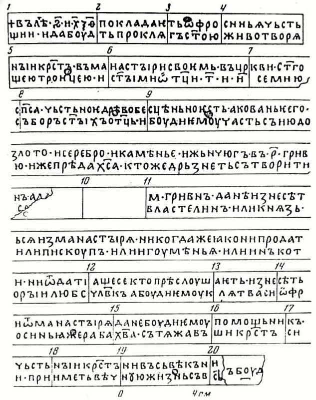


Cross of St Eŭfrasińnia of Polacak. The replica was made by the master jeweller Mikola Kuźmič in 1992–1997 based on drawings, photographs and descriptions of the original

It was Eŭfrasińnia's intention that the cross made by Bohša should 'create anew' the souls of the citizens of Polacak and of all the people of her native country. The cross represents a combination of Christian values and national ideals. It is a symbol of the holiness and true statehood of old Belarus.



The Polacak frescoes grab the attention of the viewer, especially with their lifelike portrayal of women. Unknown female saint. Church of the Holy Saviour. 12th century



Inscription on the Cross of St Eŭfrasińnia

The cross had six points symbolising the six days in which God created the World. Some 52cm in length and 2.5cm thick, it was made of cypress wood. The front and back were covered with gold inlaid with precious stones and ornaments, as well as 20 enamel icons portraying Jesus Christ, the Mother of God, John the Baptist, the apostles Peter and Paul and other saints. Special compartments within the cross held the relics; among them was a piece of the True Cross with drops of the Sacred Blood.

In 1941 the national treasure disappeared from the Mahilioŭ History Museum and no trace of it has yet been found. According to the latest information it may be in storage in a museum somewhere in Russia.

Building of the former Mahilioŭ Land Bank. It was from a vault in this building that the Cross of Eŭfrasińnia of Polacak disappeared in July 1941. Photograph of the 1930s





Translating books from Greek into Slavonic. Methodius and copyists. Miniature from the Radzivil Chronicle



St Ephrem the Syrian and St Basil the Great. 12th-century miniature

Literacy

Literacy was widespread in the lands of Belarus in the period between the 11th and 13th centuries. Valuable evidence for this is provided by the Cross of St Eŭfrasińnia; it bears a lengthy inscription, which includes the names of the maker of the Cross and of the person who ordered it, as well as other interesting historical details.

On the bed of the river Dźvina four boulders were discovered, with crosses and inscriptions in Old East Slavonic, 'Lord, come to the aid of Thy servant Borys' carved on them in the 12th century. One of these so-called Barys Stones can nowadays be seen next to the Cathedral of St Sophia in Polacak.

Of enormous value to scholars are the old documents scratched on birch bark that archaeologists have discovered in Smaliensk, Viciebsk and Amścislaŭ. They prove that not only the clergy and the aristocracy knew how to read and write but simple townsfolk were also literate.



This is what the books of the time looked

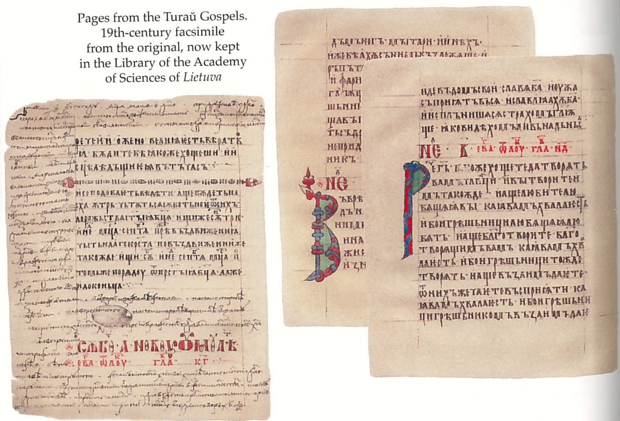


Birch-bark document from Viciebsk



Writing tools and book clasps. From archaeological excavations in Bieraście

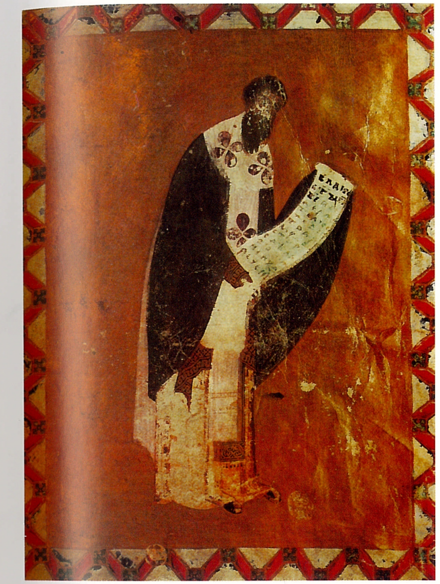
Manuscript books of that period are real works of art. They were written on parchment and decorated with historiated initials and miniature drawings. The oldest manuscript book produced in Belarus that we know about is the Turaŭ Gospels of the 11th century.



Pages from the Turaŭ Gospels. 19th-century facsimile from the original, now kept in the Library of the Academy of Sciences of *Lietuva*



Gospel according to St Mark. 13th-century Belarusian manuscript



St Basil the Great. From 12th-century *Service Book*. Polacak-Smaliensk school

Klim Smaliacič

The writer, philosopher and churchman Klim Smaliacič was one of the most learned men of his time. He received his education in Constantinople but rejected a career in Byzantium, preferring to come back home. Soon after his return Smaliacič was appointed Metropolitan of Kyiv, the head of the Christian Church in the East Slavonic lands.

His most famous pupil and follower was Aŭram of Smaliensk. His contemporaries were greatly impressed by his oratorical skills and literary talent. From his *Vita* we know that schools existed in his home town in the 12th century; books were copied and icons painted there.

Klim Smaliacič was well versed in biblical texts and the writings of the Church Fathers Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, Ephrem the Syrian and John Chrysostom, as well as classical authors such as Homer, Aristotle and Plato.

The *Lay of Prince Igor's campaign*

Written some eight centuries ago, this poetical work of genius laid the foundations for the literatures of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia. It tells of events that actually took place, *ie* a campaign led by Prince Igor against the Cumans. The anonymous author of the poem calls upon the princes to cease fighting among themselves and join forces in order to resist the enemy onslaught. He mentions the famed Usiaslaŭ the Sorcerer on several occasions. The poet obviously admires the Prince of Polacak, seeing in him both a skilled politician and a gifted military commander who remained faithful to his country throughout his life.

It is evident that the author of the *Lay of Prince Igor's campaign* was well acquainted with the history of Polacak. From this and his obvious admiration for Usiaslaŭ the Sorcerer it is possible to conclude that the author of the poem may have come from what is now Belarus.



SS Barys and Hlieb. Cast bronze. Mid-12th century. Found in Kopyś.

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE CRUSADERS



Great battle helm.
19th-century replica

The fight against the invaders was led by Prince Valodša of Polacak.
The Germans called him 'King Valdemar' in their chronicles.

Towards the end of the 12th century a group of German knights, priests and merchants landed in the estuary of the river Dźvina. In 1201 they founded the city of Riga and transformed it into a mighty fortress. One year later the Catholic Bishop Albert (Albrecht) established the military order of the Brothers of the Sword. The name derived from the red sword with cross above depicted on the knights' white cloaks. The Brothers of the Sword were also known as the Livonian Order.

The Order declared that its official purpose was to bring Christianity to the local pagan population: the Baltic (Semgalians, Latgalians and Couronians) and Ugro-Finnic (Livonians and Estonians) tribes. Its real aim was, however, to seize other peoples' territories and push on further to the east.

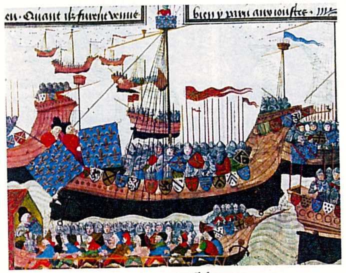
The lower reaches of the river Dźvina had already been under the rule of Polacak long before the appearance of the German knights, and the people living there paid tribute to that city. Two fortified towns were situated on the Baltic territory along the river, Jersika and Koknese. They were administered by vassal rulers of the dynasty of Rahvalod appointed by the princes of Polacak. In this way the crusaders' aggressive policy came into direct conflict with the state interests of the Principality of Polacak, which at that time was ruled by Valodša (Uladzimir).

In 1203 Valodša led the first campaign against the fortresses built by the Germans. At the same time Prince Usievalad, the ruler in Jersike, attacked Riga. These events marked the onset of open warfare with the knights for the independence of Polacak.

Some time later a large army of the Order moved into Livonian territory.



Seal of Albert, Bishop of Riga. Rubbing



Crusaders set sail for war.
Engraving from Froissart's *Chronicles*.
Second half of the 14th century



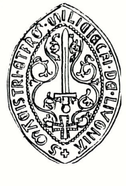
Archaeological finds in Jersika, a fortified city on the lower Dźvina ruled from Polacak



Knights' swords. 13th–14th centuries

CHRONOLOGY

1186–1216 – Valodša reigns in Polacak
1203 – Valodša heads a campaign into the lower reaches of the Dźvina
1208 – Prince Viačka defends Koknese
1216 – preparation for a military action against the crusaders and death of Valodša
1240 – men from Polacak participate in the rout of the Swedish knights on the river Neva
1242 – defeat of the German knights on Lake Peipus



Seal of the Order of the Sword Brethren. Rubbing



Prince Alexander of Novgorod does battle with the Swedes on the Neva in 1240. Mediaeval engraving



Depiction of the *Pahonia* on the seal of Alexander Nevsky. He received this ancient Kryvičian coat of arms as part of the dowry that came with his wife, the Polacak Princess Aliaksandra

The Livonians sought the aid of the Prince of Polacak. Valodša and his men laid siege to the fortress of Holm, but had to withdraw when German reinforcements arrived.

The crusaders continued to advance along the Dźvina and in 1208 reached Koknese. Prince Viačka of the Rahvalod dynasty refused to lay down his arms and, when he realised that Polacak would not come to his assistance, had to burn his fortress to the ground. He retreated with a couple of hundred warriors into the Novgorod territory. This talented military commander was later in charge of the defence of Yur'ev (Dorpat, now Tartu in Estonia) and died a hero's death in battle with the crusaders.

One year after capturing Koknese the Germans seized Jersika.

Prince Valodša of Polacak signed an agreement with Albert, Bishop of Riga, in which he ceded his territories in the Baltic region and gave up any right to tribute from the local population. However, Polacak made use of the peace to strengthen its own position.

The political situation pushed Polacak into an alliance with Novgorod, which was also under threat from the crusader onslaught. The two powerful Slavonic principalities were brought closer together when, in 1239, Prince Alexander of Novgorod married Aliaksandra, the daughter of Prince Bračyslaŭ of Polacak.

A year later troops from Polacak helped the Prince of Novgorod gain a victory over the Swedish knights on the river Neva. It is this triumph that gave Alexander his sobriquet 'Nevsky'.

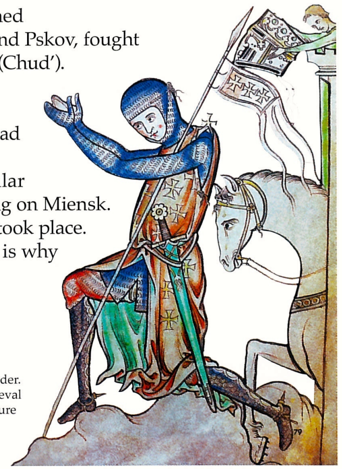
It was in this 'great slaughter' that a man from Polacak, Jakaŭ by name, won glory for himself. The chronicler records how, armed with only a sword, he fought successfully against dozens of knights and earned the special praise of the Prince.

Two more years passed. Men from Polacak and Viciebsk together formed one third of the Slavonic army, that alongside warriors from Novgorod and Pskov, fought to the death against the crusaders in the Battle on the Ice of Lake Peipus (Chud').

At the same time the old Belarusian principalities had to face a new enemy: the combined forces of the Mongols and Tatars. By the time they reached the frontiers of what is now Belarus the invaders from the east had subjugated huge swathes of territory from China to Eastern Europe. The chronicles have preserved accounts of their attack on Bieraście. Popular tradition has it that a huge Tatar army led by Khan Kojdan was advancing on Miensk. The town of Krutahorje stood in their way, and it was there that a battle took place. The Tatars were defeated and Kojdan killed. He was buried there, which is why the town is supposed to have been renamed Kojdanava (it is now called Dziaržynsk).

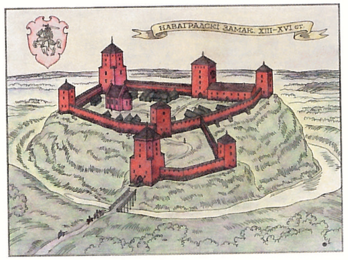
In 1216 Valodša began to prepare for a military campaign against Riga, in which troops drawn from all over the territory of Polacak and its allies were to fight. However, Valodša died unexpectedly just before the army was due to set out, probably poisoned by agents of the crusaders. The campaign did not happen, but throughout the 30 years of his reign Valodša never once allowed the Germans to set foot on Kryvičian soil.

By contrast to the Russian lands, the Belarusian principalities succeeded in preserving their independence and did not bear the Tatar-Mongol yoke.



Crusader. Mediaeval miniature

A NEW STATE



Novaharodak castle.
Artist's impression
by Jaŭhien Kulik

Modern Lithuanians (*Lietuviai*, as they call themselves) and the modern Republic of Lithuania (*Lietuva*) should not be confused with the historical Lithuanians or Litvins and the Grand Duty of Lithuania. The Litvins lived on what is now the territory of Belarus; they played an important role in the formation of the Belarusian nation. The most prominent ancestors of the modern Lithuanian nation were the Samogitians. Before the 13th century they had no towns and no writing, although their society was already divided into wealthy nobility and common folk.

A new state arose when historical Lithuania (Litva) merged with the principality of Novaharodak to form the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Mindaŭ was its first ruler and its first capital was Novaharodak.



Pagan wizard's story.
Illustration by Michal Elvira Andriolli (Michał Elwiro Andriolli)
to *Konrad Wallenrod*
by Adam Mickievič (Mickiewicz)

Litva – Lithuania

In the face of the threat from the crusaders in the west and from the Tatar-Mongols in the east, the Belarusian principalities were understandably interested in becoming more unified. It so happened that Novaharodak showed the greatest initiative in bringing them together. The Lithuanian princes also played a great part in the process of unification.

Historians are still divided over the origins and the meaning of the name Litva. Some of them consider that the 'Litva' of the chronicles was situated on the territory of modern Belarus. The reader can gain some idea of where it may have been by drawing a straight line from Miensk to Maladziečna, from there to Novaharodak and then to Liachavičy and so back to Miensk.

Mindaŭ

The chronicler has an entry for the year 1235 which refers to 'Mindaŭ's Litva'. In one of the Belarusian sources, namely *Chronika Bychaŭca* (the Chronicle of Bychaviec), we read that Mindaŭ (Mindaugas) killed some of his rivals, drove others abroad, and then 'began to rule alone over all the land of Litva; he achieved glory and great honour and permitted no one to oppose him'.



Baptism of Mindaŭ.
19th-century engraving

CHRONOLOGY

1235 – first mention of 'Mindaŭ's Litva' in the chronicles
1253 – Mindaŭ is crowned in Novaharodak
1260 – defeat of the crusaders near Lake Durbe



Seal of Mindaŭ.
Modern replica
by Vital Katovič.
2005

It was not long before a large number of dissatisfied vassals began an uprising against Mindaŭ. He and his retinue were forced to seek help and so headed for Novaharodak. The citizens saw in Mindaŭ both a warrior and a politician who could consolidate their city's position and join adjacent territories to it. The Lithuanian duke found the support he needed and accepted their invitation to ascend the throne of Novaharodak.

The pagan Mindaŭ was compelled to adopt the religion of his subjects, Orthodox Christianity. He was duly baptised in Novaharodak in 1246. However, the political situation soon forced him to switch religions again.

The Lithuanian rulers who were hostile to Mindaŭ formed an alliance with the Livonian knights and the Archbishopric of Riga, creating a very powerful coalition. Mindaŭ found himself in a position where he had to consent to convert to Catholicism. This was a wise political move, as it helped him emerge victorious from the struggle. Mindaŭ enjoyed the support of Pope Innocent IV himself.

In 1253 Mindaŭ received the crown from representatives of the Pope. The ceremony took place in Novaharodak. The duchy officially became a kingdom, a status that would create the stable conditions necessary for dealing with Europe. Just a few years later, however, Mindaŭ tore up his agreement with the Livonian Order, and then with the Pope. Mindaŭ's change of policy was most likely caused by his desire to annex Samogitia after previously ceding it to the crusaders. In the summer of 1260 the German knights suffered a crushing defeat near Lake Durbe. Mindaŭ reverted to paganism and declared open war on the crusaders.



Grand Duke Mindaŭ.
Engraving from
Alessandro Guagnini's
Sarmatiae Europeae descriptio
(Description of Sarmatian Europe). 1581



Pahonia,
the old Belarusian
coat of arms.
16th sentury

The struggle for power



Grand Duke Vicień.
16th-century engraving

The internecine feuding between the Lithuanian dukes led in 1263 to a conspiracy and the murder of Mindaŭ and his two young sons. Some time later Mindaŭ's son Vojšalk (Vaišvilkas) seized power. He was savage in settling scores with his father's enemies but was himself soon killed.

The next Grand Duke, Trajdzień (Traidenis), succeeded in extending his authority to the upper reaches of the Nioman river.

The Grand Duchy continued to grow and consolidate its power during the reign of Vicień (Vytenis). The chronicles link his name to the appearance of the state coat of arms, the *Pahonia*. In fact the *Pahonia* was much older; it had already been in use in the Principality of Polacak. The Russian historian Vassilii Tatishchev was able to consult the subsequently lost Polacak Chronicle; he maintained that 'from time immemorial the coat of arms of Belarus depicted a knight on horseback with his sword raised'.

Vicień became Grand Duke towards the end of the 13th century. He continued the policies of his predecessors that were aimed at extending and strengthening the state. The chronicler reports that 'he designed for himself a coat of arms: a knight in armour on horseback with a sword, called the *Pahonia*'.

THE GRAND DUCHY OF LITHUANIA



Pahonia coat of arms of the Grand Duchy. From the General Armorial of 1578

With the agreement of the nobility and merchants Polacak voluntarily joined the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. At the same time it preserved a large measure of autonomy. At the beginning of the 14th century the territories of the Pinsk, Bieraście and Miensk Principalities were annexed to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, largely by peaceful means. Viciebsk became part of the Grand Duchy following the marriage of Grand Duke Aĺhierd and Princess Maryja daughter of Jarasłaŭ of Viciebsk.

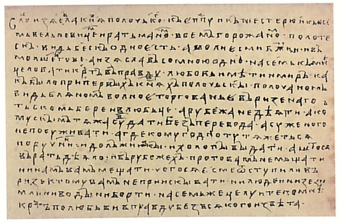
Unification of the Belarusian lands

After neighbouring territories had been annexed to Novaharodak during Mindaŭ's reign, other old Belarusian principalities voluntarily merged with the new state. Their primary concern was to strengthen the authority of the state, and so to ensure that the inhabitants were properly defended against enemies and to enable agriculture, commerce and crafts to flourish.

In 1307 the Principality of Polacak joined the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, while retaining a considerable measure of autonomy. On several occasions the rulers of the Grand Duchy gave the citizens of Polacak written guarantees 'not to break with tradition or introduce new-fangled ideas'.



Oldest depiction of the *Pahonia* in colour. *Codex Bergshammar*. Early 15th century



The Principality of Polacak retained its independence for a long time; it voluntarily became part of the Grand Duchy on condition that it retain a considerable degree of autonomy. Deed of Iziasłaŭ, Prince of Polacak and Viciebsk. 1265

CHRONOLOGY

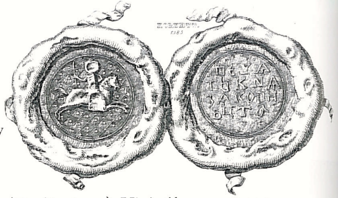
1307 – Polacak voluntarily joins the Grand Duchy of Lithuania
1314 – Davyd of Horadnia defeats the German knights
1316–1341 – rule of Grand Duke Hiedzimin
1317 – establishment of an independent Metropolitanate in the Grand Duchy
1323 – capital of the Grand Duchy transferred from Novaharodak to Viĺnia

Map of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania by Wacław Grodecki. Second edition. 1570.





Grand Duke Hiedzimin. It was in his reign that the Grand Duchy came to include almost all the Belarusian lands. Engraving from Alessandro Guagnini's *Sarmatiae Europeae descriptio*. 1581



Seals of Duke Karybut (Kaributas) of the dynasty founded by Hiedzimin. Drawing of the 19th century

Hiedzimin

During the reign of Hiedzimin (Gediminas), Vicień's successor on the Grand Ducal throne, almost the whole of what is now Belarus became part of the Grand Duchy.

Grand Duke Hiedzimin remained loyal to the pagan beliefs of his ancestors, but as head of state he was wise enough not to hinder the adherents of Christianity in any way. During his reign Vilnia witnessed the construction of both Catholic and Orthodox monasteries and churches. Belarus would preserve this tradition of tolerance between people of different faiths and ethnic origins across the centuries.

In 1323 Hiedzimin transferred the capital of the Grand Duchy from Novaharodak to Vilnia. He also changed his official title by starting to call himself 'King of Litva and Ruthenia' or 'King of the Litvins and the Ruthenians'. 'Ruthenians' or 'Rusians' were the names used at the time to refer to the Orthodox inhabitants of the Belarusian lands. As the Grand Duchy grew in size, so did its name. At first it was the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Ruthenia. After the addition of Samogitia it became the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Ruthenia and Samogitia. However, the state was most frequently called the Grand Duchy of Lithuania or just Litva.



Hiedzimin enters Kyiv in 1321. 19th-century engraving

The ruler was also concerned that his Orthodox subjects should have an ecclesiastical authority of their own, rather than be under the sway of the church hierarchy of Moscow. Accordingly, he established an independent Orthodox Metropolitanate in the Grand Duchy in 1317. It was headed by Metropolitan Fieafil (Theophilus), a Belarusian who had his residence in Novaharodak.



Former residence of the Grand Dukes in Troki (now Trakai in *Lietuva*). This is what the castle looked at the beginning of the 19th century. Engraving of the time



Lithuania. Engraving by Michael Wolgemut and Wilhelm Pleydenwurff from the *Nuremberg Chronicle* of Hartmann Schedel. 1493

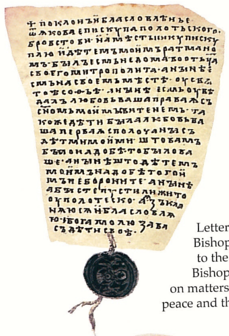


So-called 'Lithuanian' silver ingots. 12th–14th centuries

Hiedzimin frequently had to defend the independence of the Grand Duchy from aggressive neighbours, namely the German crusaders. The Teutonic knights suffered a severe defeat in a battle on the river Akmiana (Akmena) in 1331. Ten years later Grand Duke Hiedzimin was struck by a bullet and killed during the storming of a crusader castle.

Burial of Hiedzimin. By the 19th-century Belarusian artist Kazimir Alchimovič





Letter from Jakaŭ, Bishop of Polacak, to the suffragan Bishop of Riga, on matters concerning peace and the grain trade



These seals affirmed the 1330 treaty between Polacak and Riga. They are evidence of the independence of Polacak within the Grand Duchy of Lithuania



Prince Skirhajla, appointed Grand Ducal deputy in Polacak while still pagan. The citizens would not accept him until he had been baptised. Fragment of an engraving from *Sarmatiae Europeae descriptio* by Alessandro Guagnini. 1581

Davyd of Horadnia

The crusaders never abandoned their intention of seizing the Belarusian territories along the river Nioman. In 1284 they moved against Horadnia, captured the castle and set fire to the city. Both Horadnia and Novaharodak were subjected to renewed attacks in 1295. The citizens of Horadnia were once again confronted with German knights at the walls of their city in 1305 and 1306. Five years later the knights attacked twice.

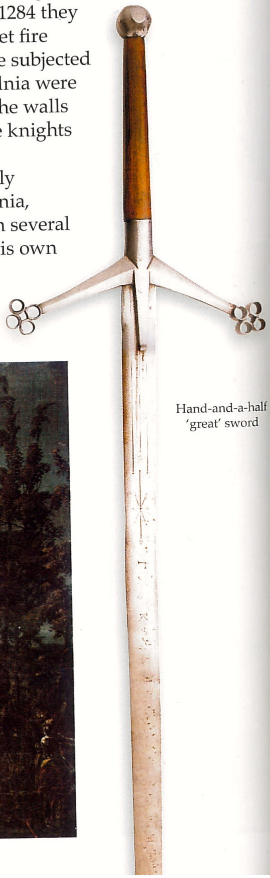
The lands along the river Nioman were bravely defended by Davyd, the *starasta* (elder) of Horadnia, who was renowned for his military prowess. On several occasions he defeated the uninvited guests on his own lands and then rode at the head of his troops into German territory.



Knight's great helm. 19th-century replica



Crusaders set off to attack the castle at Punia. Painting by Vincent Smakoŭski. 1837



Hand-and-a-half 'great' sword

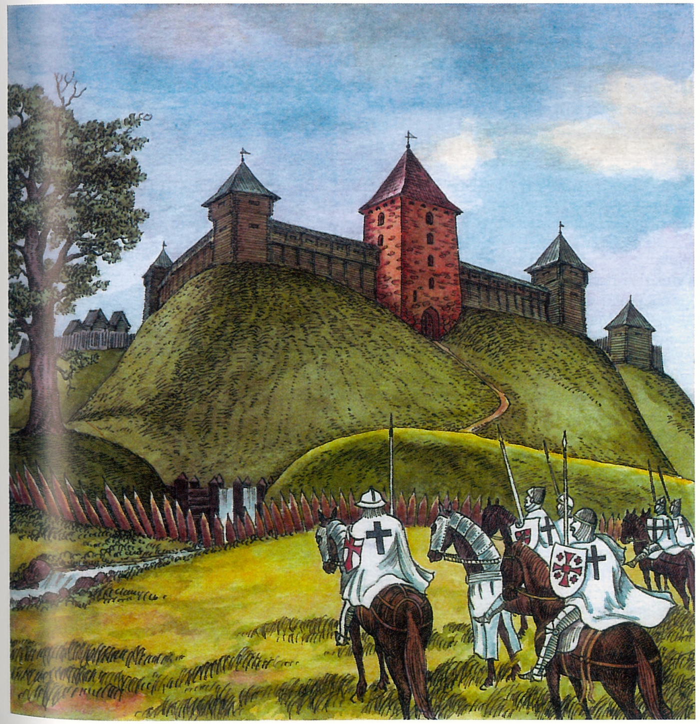


Litvins fighting Teutonic Knights. Relief of the first half of the 14th century

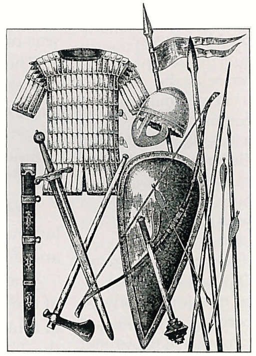
In 1314 the crusaders made three incursions into the Grand Duchy. In the September campaign of that year the German army was led by the Marshal of the Teutonic Order himself. Under Davyd's command the citizens of Horadnia made their castle impregnable. The Germans plundered the areas surrounding the city and then moved on. They burned Novaharodak to the ground but were disappointed by the absence of loot. Meanwhile Davyd of Horadnia seized the food supply dumps that the Germans had made in the forest, as well as the horses that had been left in reserve. All the Germans found in place of their supplies were dead guards. Davyd had also made sure that the invaders would find no supplies anywhere in the area. The remnants of the starving German army were in despair. Scarcely any of them made it back to Prussia.

Unfortunately Davyd was killed at the height of his fame. During one of his campaigns in 1326 he was stabbed in the back by a traitor, a Polish knight who had sold his services to the crusaders.

It was Davyd of Horadnia who in 1314 inflicted the heaviest defeat on the Teutonic Order. Very few of the Order's army, under the personal command of the Marshal himself, returned to Prussia.



Crusaders at Novaharodak. Picture by Viktar Staščaniuk



Weapons and armour of Belarusian warriors of the 12th–13th centuries. Modern drawing

GRAND DUKE AĹHIERD



Grand Duke Aĺhierd, victor over the Tatars in the Battle of the Syni Vody. Fragment of an engraving from *Sarmatiae Europeae descriptio* by Alessandro Guagnini. 1581

One of the Moscow chroniclers has left us this description of Aĺhierd, 'He drank neither wine nor beer, possessed a great intellect and placed many lands under his control. He planned his campaigns in secret and in war relied not so much on the number of troops he commanded, as on his military prowess.' A knight who travelled to Viĺnia as a member of a German delegation said of him, 'The Duke is of noble appearance, he is blue-eyed and fair-haired and above average in height. He speaks in a rich, deep voice and is an excellent horseman.'

The Grand Duchy of Lithuania continued to grow in strength in Aĺhierd's reign, doubling in size. Aĺhierd proved himself to be a talented military commander and a shrewd politician. He had an excellent command of German, but always spoke with envoys of the crusaders through an interpreter. Old Belarusian had by this time already become the official language of the Grand Duchy.

The Battle on the Streva

The Teutonic Order continued their incursions and raids into Belarusian territory. The German knights were attempting to cut the country off from the sea. Aĺhierd beat off six large-scale attacks. In 1348 the army of the Grand Duchy encountered the Germans on the river Streva, a tributary of the Nioman. The crusaders were supported by mercenaries from England and France; the bulk of the Grand Duchy's army was made up of Belarusian regiments from Polacak, Viciebsk, Smaliensk and Bieraście.

The fighting on the Streva was exceptionally ferocious. The Germans spread rumours that they had been victorious, but in actual fact the battle had not brought them decisive success. The determined resistance to the crusaders' aggression continued.

Victory at the Syni Vody (Blue Waters)

There was also trouble on the southern frontiers of the Grand Duchy; beyond them lay the lands of the Tatars. Aĺhierd decided to smash the Horde in one huge battle and advanced with his troops far into their territory.

The battle took place in 1362 by the Syni Vody (Blue Waters) river, a tributary of the Pivdennyi Buh. Aĺhierd gave the Tatars no chance to employ their usual tactic of attacking suddenly from the flanks and encircling their enemy. His troops first beat off the Tatars' initial blow and then launched a full-scale attack from the front and the sides. The Tatars were unable to withstand this powerful onslaught; they turned and fled.



Tatar khan. Old Chinese miniature



The castle in Miedniki (now Medininkai in *Lietuva*) was Aĺhierd's summer residence. Artist Napalieon Orda saw only the remnants of its former glory. Lithograph after the original watercolour. Mid-19th century

CHRONOLOGY

1345–1377 – reign of Grand Duke Aĺhierd
1348 – Battle on the Streva against the Teutonic knights
1362 – defeat of the Tatars at the Syni Vody
1368–1372 – Aĺhierd's campaigns against Moscow
1399 – Battle on the Vorskla against the Tatars. Death of Andrej, last Prince of Polacak



Battle of Kulikovo. Miniature from the 17th-century manuscript of the *Tale of the rout of Mamai*



A 2,000-strong regiment from Polacak fought in the Battle of Kulikovo. Troops in line before the slaughter begins. 16th-century miniature

Their army was completely shattered. What remained of the Tatar cavalry fled as far as the river Danube. This was the first great victory over the Tatars in the whole of Eastern Europe.

Campaigns against Moscow

Grand Duke Aĺhierd's policy was to expand the territories of the Grand Duchy eastwards. This was a great source of irritation to the rulers of Moscow.

The Muscovite army launched an attack on the town of Tver' in 1368. Its ruler, Prince Mikhail, appealed to Aĺhierd for help. (Aĺhierd was married to Mikhail's sister, Princess Uĺliana.) The troops sent by Moscow against Aĺhierd were heavily defeated and almost all their commanders were killed. Prince Dmitrii of Moscow burned the settlements outside his city walls and shut himself up in the Kremlin.

Two years later Aĺhierd's army once again reached the walls of the Kremlin. After a siege lasting eight days Dmitrii sued for peace and sent Aĺhierd splendid gifts. The chronicles tell us that Grand Duke Aĺhierd spared the Kremlin ruler, 'He bestowed his favour on him, did not seek to remove him from Moscow and concluded peace with him.' Aĺhierd stressed his victory by riding up to the Kremlin wall and touching it with his spear.

The peace with Moscow, however, was short-lived. In 1372 the Prince of Tver' once again sought help in the struggle with the expansionist aggression of Moscow. The Grand Duchy's armies set out on a campaign which ended in another peace treaty.

Prince Andrej of Polacak commanded the right flank of the Muscovite army in the Battle of Kulikovo.

The crushing defeat of the enemy at the Syni Vody, in which troops from Novaharadok played a significant role, led to the liberation of the Ukrainian lands from the Tatars. Together with Kyiv, they became part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Andrej of Polacak

Aĺhierd had twelve sons. The eldest of them, Andrej, ruled in Polacak. He was certain that, after his father's death, the Grand Ducal crown would pass to him, but in fact it was another of Aĺhierd's sons, Jahajla (Jogaila, Jagiełło), who became Grand Duke. Andrej and his retinue were forced to leave Polacak and seek an agreement with Dmitrii of Moscow.

Andrej of Polacak, together with 2,000 warriors from that city, took part in the Battle of Kulikovo. He commanded 'the right-hand regiment', *ie* the right flank of the Russian army.

Some time later Andrej succeeded in regaining Polacak. His long and tempestuous life came to an end in 1399 in a savage battle with the Tatars on the river Vorskla. The last of the Polacak princes was then in the 75th year of his life.



Forces of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania do battle with the Tatars on the river Vorskla. Mediaeval engraving

THE UNION OF KREVA



Uladzislaŭ Jahajla's coin with the shield of his coat of arms. Obverse

After Aĺhierd's death his place as Grand Duke was taken by his younger son Jahajla. Fearing the rivalry of his uncle, Duke Kiejstut (Kęstutis), Jahajla first imprisoned him in the tower of Kreva Castle and then had him strangled. Jahajla clung on to power, but his authority was not recognised by Kiejstut's son Duke Vitaŭt (Vytautas) or by Andrej, Prince of Polacak.

Just at this time the neighbouring state, the Kingdom of Poland, was going through a very difficult period in its history. The country was without a ruler, and Queen Jadwiga was only 13 years of age. Poland was threatened with conquest by the Germans and loss of independence. Faced with this difficult situation, many of the Polish magnates saw a way out in an alliance with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Such an alliance was even more attractive because it guaranteed peace along Poland's frontier with the Grand Duchy. The memory of the Grand Duchy's victorious incursion into Poland and the capture of 23,000 prisoners in 1376 was still strong.

An act of union was signed in Kreva Castle on 14 August 1385. According to its terms Jahajla was granted the right to marry Queen Jadwiga and become King of Poland.



Grand Duke Jahajla. Fragment of an engraving from Guagnini's *Sarmatiae Europeae descriptio*. 1581



Wedding of Jahajla and Jadwiga in Kraków. 19th-century engraving

The danger posed by the Teutonic Order meant that the alliance with the Polish Crown was of benefit to the Grand Duchy as well. The Polish ambassadors' negotiations with Jahajla came to an end in August 1385 with the signing of the act of union of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland.



Jahajla's seal. Late 14th century

CHRONOLOGY

1377–1381, 1382–1392 – reign of Grand Duke Jahajla

1385 – Union of Kreva, linking the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland

1386–1434 – Jahajla is King of Poland



Jahajla presented two aurochs to Sigismund, the Holy Roman Emperor. One had been roasted whole, the other salted in barrels. From *Chronic des Konstanzer Konzils* (Chronicle of the Council of Constance) by Ulrich von Richental. Prague. *c* 1464



Jahajla founded a university in Kraków, the capital city of the Kingdom of Poland at the time. It still bears his name (the Jagiełłonian University). This was for two centuries the most easily accessible seat of learning for Belarusian students. Illuminated engraving by Michael Wolgemut and Wilhelm Pleydenwurff from the *Nuremberg Chronicle* of Hartmann Schedel. 1493

He undertook to adopt Catholicism and to have his brothers, his relatives and all his pagan subjects baptised, and to pay a huge sum of money (200,000 florins) to tear up the marriage contract between Jadwiga and Wilhelm von Habsburg. He was also to set free all his Polish Christian captives. However the main obligation that the act of union placed on Jahajla was to join the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania for ever to the Polish Crown. The text described by the Poles as the original act of the Union of Kreva contains conditions that are quite unfavourable to the Grand Duchy and more akin to an act of capitulation. Belarusian statesmen have long considered it a forgery, whereas the Poles have frequently used it as grounds for their claims to Belarusian territory.

Kreva. Ruins of the castle. Lithograph after a drawing by Napalieon Orda. Mid-19th century







Seal of Grand Duke Vitaŭt

Coronation of Uladzislaŭ Jahajla.
Fragment of a fresco
in the Cathedral, Wawel Castle,
Kraków. Late 15th century

In the following year, 1386, Jahajla was baptised in Kraków according to the Catholic rite. He married Jadwiga and was crowned King, taking the name of Uladzislaŭ Jahajla (Ladislaus Jagiello, Władysław II Jagiełło), thereby founding the dynastic line of the Jahajlavičy (Jagiełłonians, Jagiełłons, *ie* descendants of Jahajla).

One year later the entire pagan population of the Grand Duchy was baptised Roman Catholics.

The alliance of the two states greatly enhanced their military might. It also played an important role in extending the cultural contacts between the Grand Duchy and the Polish Kingdom as well as the Grand Duchy's ties with other European countries.



Kraków Barbican.
It provided
additional defence
for the main entrance
to the Castle.
Early 19th-century
engraving

This marked the start of the construction of Catholic churches and monasteries in the Belarusian territories. Jahajla wanted to make the Catholicism the state religion, but this gave rise to protests on the part of the Orthodox believers. Some Belarusian aristocrats did indeed convert to Catholicism.

Parish church in Novaharodak,
where Jahajla married Sofja Halšanskaja in 1422.
She was the founder of the Jahajlavič (Jagiełłonian) dynasty.
Photograph by Anatol Kliaščuk



Grand Duke and King Jahajla.
Painting by Marcello Bacciarelli.
Late 18th – early 19th centuries



Pahonia coat of arms
on Jahajla's tomb in Kraków



From the legal point of view the act of union effectively meant the incorporation of the Grand Duchy in Poland. (Some scholars regard this document as a later forgery, because nothing was known about it in Jahajla's lifetime, and it is nowhere mentioned in the Belarusian chronicles.) In practice it was impossible to annex such a powerful state. Thanks to the firm stance adopted by the supporters of the Grand Duchy's sovereignty the Polish plans were never carried out.

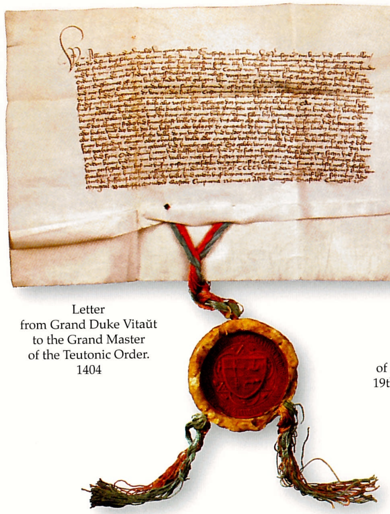
VITAŬT THE GREAT



Grand Duke Vitaŭt. Fragment of an engraving from *Sarmatiae Europeae descriptio* by Alessandro Guagnini. 1581

Vitaŭt was the son of Kiejstut who had been killed on the orders of his nephew Jahajla. He was unwilling to reconcile himself to the role of vassal. The nobility of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania also wished to see a proper monarch on the throne, one who would be capable of conducting independent internal and foreign policies. In the winter of 1389–1390 Vitaŭt raised a rebellion against his cousin. He was unable to seize Vilnia, which was defended by a powerful Polish garrison, and so was compelled to seek the support of the German knights, to whom he transferred control of Samogitia. In 1391 Vitaŭt captured the castle of Horadnia and a year later he seized Novaharodak.

Jahajla had no option but to begin secret negotiations with Vitaŭt, who tore up the vassalage agreement with the Teutonic Order, burned three of their castles to the ground and returned home. The cousins met at Vostraŭ near Lida in August 1392. There they signed an accord, under the terms of which all authority in the Grand Duchy was transferred to Vitaŭt for the rest of his life. He was granted the title of Grand Duke of Lithuania and Ruthenia and immediately set about strengthening the state. He found most support from among the *bajary* who received from him generous allocations of land and peasants. During his reign the Grand Duchy began to strike its own coinage.



Letter from Grand Duke Vitaŭt to the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order. 1404

In the Battle of Grunwald the combined forces of the Grand Duchy and Poland crushed what was at the time the most powerful army in Europe – the army of the Teutonic Order. The Germans dropped all their claims to Samogitia; this strengthened the Grand Duchy even more.



Sofja, daughter of Grand Duke Vitaŭt. 19th-century engraving based on a piece of 15th-century embroidery

CHRONOLOGY

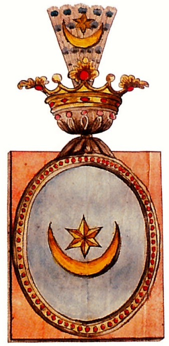
1392 – Vostraŭ accord, transferring authority in the Grand Duchy to Vitaŭt
1392–1430 – reign of Grand Duke Vitaŭt
1404 – Principality of Smaliensk joins the Grand Duchy of Lithuania
1413 – Union of Horodło signed by the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland



Vitaŭt the Great. 19th-century lithograph based on a mediaeval portrait

The idea of independence was very popular in the Grand Duchy. When Queen Jadwiga, very dissatisfied with Vitaŭt's policies, reminded him of his vassal status, he made an appeal to his nobility. At a session of the Diet in Vilnia he received an unequivocal response, 'We are not subjects of Poland, we have always been free. Our forebears never paid tribute to the Poles and we won't pay either. We will stand firm for our rights and privileges.'

Vitaŭt was very successful in pursuing a policy of extending the frontiers of the state. He invited Khan Tokhtamysh to the Grand Duchy after he had been stripped of his power in the Golden Horde. It was at this time that the Tatars began to settle in Belarus; it was to become for them a second homeland. In 1404 Vitaŭt finally succeeded in annexing the old Kryvičian town of Smaliensk and its surrounding territory to the Grand Duchy. After three campaigns against Moscow, Vitaŭt reached an agreement the Muscovite Grand Duke Vassilii I, by which the frontier between the Grand Duchy and Muscovy was to run along the river Ugra, a tributary of the Oka. After Vassilii's death Vitaŭt subjugated the principalities of Riazan' and Tver', together with the territories along the upper reaches of the Oka. In the south he annexed the lands along the lower Dnieper; the Grand Duchy thereby acquired an outlet to the Black Sea.



After the Union of Horodło coats of arms demonstrating the noble status of families and individuals became widespread throughout the Grand Duchy. One of the oldest of these coats of arms was *Lialiva*, used by nearly 350 clans (the Abramovič, Aliachnovič, Čapski, Darahastajski, Hliabovič, Tarnaŭski, Tyškievič, Zabiarezinski and other families)



Seal of Duke Kiejstut, who ruled in the western part of the Grand Duchy. 19th-century drawing after the original



Duke Kiejstut, Vitaŭt's father. Early 19th-century engraving

Kipryjan (Cyprian), Metropolitan of 'Kyiv and all Ruthenia,' brings reconciliation between Vitaŭt and Jahajla. Mediaeval miniature





Vitaŭt just before the Battle on the Vorskla. Mediaeval miniature

Crusaders poison Vitaŭt's children. 19th-century engraving



The Grand Duke of Lithuania and the King of Poland, together with the lords and *bajary* from both states, met in 1413 in the castle of Horodło on the Buh river, for the purpose of reviewing the terms of a new state union. The Horodło Union, as it became known, recognised that the Grand Duchy of Lithuania would retain its independence even after Vitaŭt's death. With the aim of bringing the two allied states closer together 47 *bajar* families of the Grand Duchy exchanged coats of arms with the Polish nobility. The Grand Duchy was divided into palatinates on the Polish model. Noblemen who were Catholic by religion received new privileges. At the same time Vitaŭt was well aware of the role played by the Orthodox population of the Grand Duchy; he re-established the independent Orthodox Metropolitanate with its centre in Novaharodak. With the aim of strengthening the state still further he began to formulate ideas about the union of the Orthodox and Catholic churches.

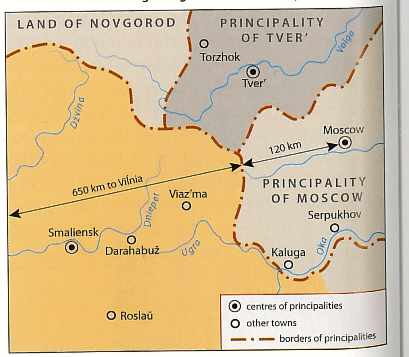
The international authority of the Grand Duchy had grown considerably after the victory at Grunwald. This, together with the rapid expansion of the state, led to the idea of transforming the Grand Duchy into a Kingdom. Vitaŭt gave his consent to receive from the Pope both the title of King and the crown. The coronation was arranged for September 1430 but it never took place, because of the intrigues of the Poles.

During Vitaŭt's reign the Grand Duchy of Lithuania became the most powerful state in Central and Eastern Europe.



Earliest coins struck in the Grand Duchy. Late 14th–15th centuries. Having its own coinage is one of the attributes of a state's autonomy

The eastern frontier of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania at the beginning of the 15th century



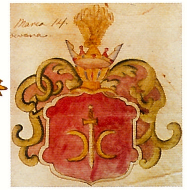


Vitaŭt the Great. Picture by Michaś Basalyha

Hundreds of noble families in the Grand Duchy used the coats of arms *Astoja*, *Habdank* and *Prus I*. Here are the names of some of them



Prus I (the Bahuslaŭski, Mitkievič, Studzinski, Višnieŭski, Zalieŭski families)



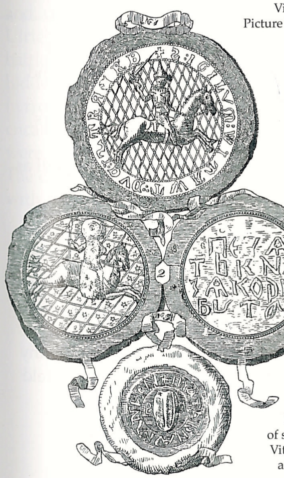
Astoja (the Ciapinski, Čachovič, Danilievič, Kačanoŭski, Kryviec, Markievič, Maroz, Miklašeŭski, Miacielski, Vajnoŭski, Vasilieŭski, Zahorski families)



Habdank (the Ablamovič, Haraburda, Krušeŭski, Liaŭkovič, Suchadoliec, Vajavodski families)

Old Castle of Horadnia, inherited by Vitaŭt from his father. It was a redoubtable stronghold in his struggle for power against Jahajla





Drawings of seals of dukes Vitaŭt, Karybut and Luhvień

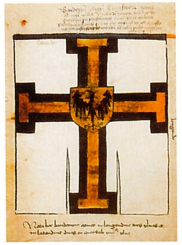


One of the acts of the 1413 Horodło Union between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland

Vitaŭt died the same year. It was in his reign that the Grand Duchy became truly grand, not only in name and size of territory (900,000 square kilometres, as against the 207,600 square kilometres of today's Republic of Belarus), but also because of the political role it played in Europe.

The Belarusian territories played an important part in the history of the Grand Duchy. The most senior posts in the state were held by Belarusians. Vitaŭt's closest entourage were also Belarusian. The ambassador of the Teutonic Order informs us that the Grand Duke and his court spoke Ruthenian, *ie* Old Belarusian. The same language was also used in state records. Samogitia and other areas inhabited by people of Baltic origin accounted for less than one fifteenth of the territory of the Grand Duchy. The life of the Grand Duchy, then the largest state in Europe, was Belarusian in form.

THE BATTLE OF GRUNWALD



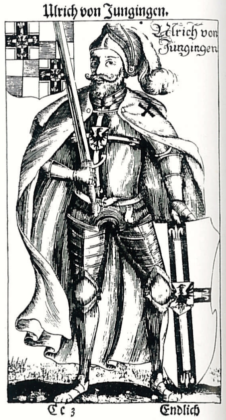
Banner
of Ulrich von Jungingen,
the Grand Master
of the Teutonic Order

The Teutonic Order was still the main enemy of the Slavs in Eastern Europe. Duke Konrad of Mazovia had rather imprudently invited the crusaders to settle on his territory for a period of 20 years. In 1237 the Teutonic Order united with the Livonian Brothers of the Sword (the Livonian Order). The crusaders established their own state on the Polish territory and on the lands seized from the Prussians, with Malbork (Marienburg) as its capital. The knights continued their aggressive raids on the lands of the Balts and Slavs, sometimes making as many as eight attacks in a year. Five times the crusaders attempted to seize Polacak, three times they tried the same with Novaharodak. Horadnia and other Belarusian towns also suffered greatly from their attacks.

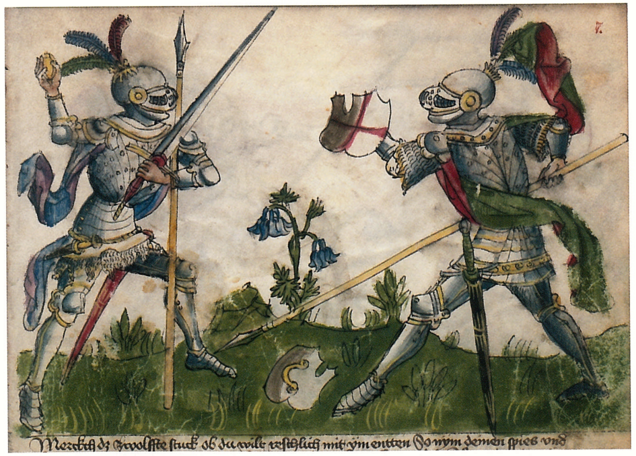
Vitaŭt and Jahajla realised that the only way to stop the aggression of the Teutonic Order was to defeat it in battle. The Grand Duke of Lithuania and the King of Poland agreed at a meeting in Novaharodak in 1408 to start a joint campaign against the Order. On their part the Order actively began to recruit knights in Western Europe.



Seal of the Grand Marshal
of the Teutonic Order.
Rubbing



Grand Master Ulrich von Jungingen,
commander of the army of the Teutonic Order
at the Battle of Grunwald, killed by a warrior
of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.
Engraving by Christoph Hartknoch.
Leipzig. 1684



German knights in the 15th-century armour.
From *Gladiatoria*, a German fencing manual.
Mid-15th century

Towards the end of May 1410 regiments from all over the Grand Duchy began to gather together in Horadnia under their 'banners', military units comprising on average 300 horsemen, as well as archers and retainers to carry the warriors' armour. The army of the Grand Duchy was led by Grand Duke Vitaŭt, while King Jahajla was in overall command of the joint forces.

The armies of the Grand Duchy and Poland encountered the enemy on 15 July 1410 on a hilly open field between the Prussian villages of Tannenberg and Grunwald.

CHRONOLOGY

15 July 1410 – defeat of the army of the Teutonic Order at Grunwald

1411 – Peace of Toruń signed between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland on the one hand and the Teutonic Order on the other

Malbork (Marienburg),
capital of the Teutonic Order.
Modern photograph





Seal of Christian,
the first Bishop
of Prussia.
Rubbing

The Teutonic knights were the first to appear and, under the leadership of the Grand Master Ulrich von Jungingen, were well prepared for battle. *Chronika Bychaŭca* records that there were hidden 'wolf-pits' to trap the enemy cavalry in front of the wedge formations of armour-encased crusaders. Behind the ranks of knights were the artillery and crossbowmen. The crusaders put up a total of 51 regiments with more than 30,000 men.



King and vassal.
Mediaeval
drawing

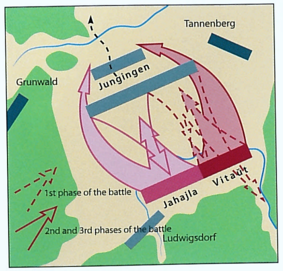
Most of the 40 regiments of the Grand Duchy came from the Belarusian territories. Amścisłaŭ, Bieraście, Darahičyn, Horadnia, Lida, Novaharodak, Pinsk, Polacak, Slonim, Smaliensk, Staradub, Troki, Vaŭkavysk, Viciebsk, Vilnia, Vorša and other towns all sent troops to the battle. 30 of the regiments had banners depicting the *Pahonia*.



Basinet.
Knight's
helmet with
pointed
visor.
Replica

The troops of Vitaŭt and Jahajla formed a front line equal in length to that of the enemy. 40 banners from the Grand Duchy were on the right flank. The Polish forces consisted of 51 banners. Bohemian and Moravian units arrived to assist them. The force commanded by Vitaŭt included Tatar cavalry under Jalal ad-Din Khan (Cäläletdin). There were some 40,000 men in the combined army. The crusaders had about 10,000 fewer knights, but they were better armed. (It should be noted that information about the numbers of men who fought in the battle varies widely from source to source. The figures 100,000 and even 150,000 sometimes crop up.)

Plan of the Battle of Grunwald





Warriors
of the Grand Duchy.
Artist's impression.
19th century

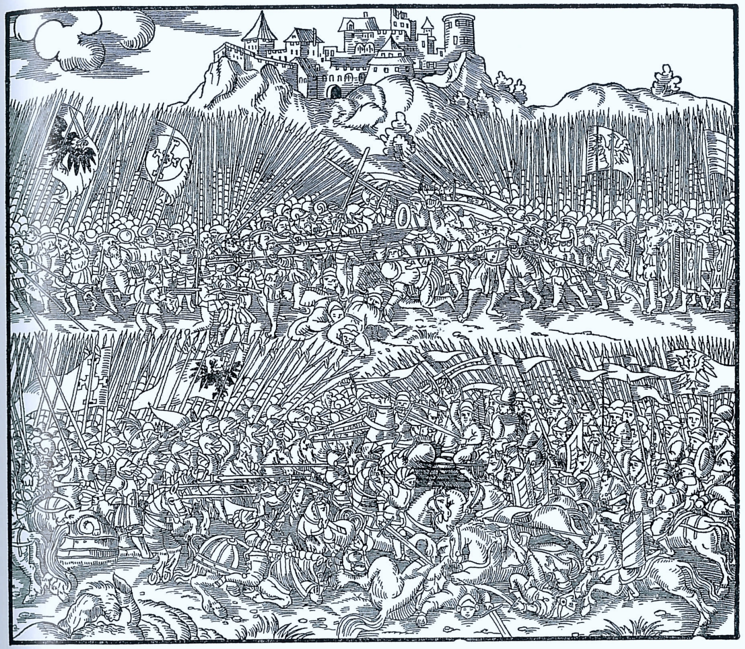


Battle of Grunwald.
Fragment of the painting by Jan Matejko. 1878.
In the centre is Grand Duke Vitaŭt

After the signal was given for the battle to start, Vitaŭt's light cavalry were the first to attack, followed shortly after by the heavy cavalry. Several rows of horsemen disappeared from sight when they fell into the 'wolf-pits', but the others found a way through and pressed the attack. The Tatar cavalry made effective use of their special weapon, the lasso, so that the front ranks of the crusaders found themselves under the hooves of their own horses. Grand Duke Vitaŭt directed the battle from the midst of his troops.

The reliance placed by the Teutonic knights on their artillery was not justified. The horsemen of the joint forces of Poland and the Grand Duchy cut down the cannoneers and crossbowmen. It was then that the Order's heavy cavalry hurled themselves on to the army of the Grand Duchy. After about an hour of stubborn resistance the men of the Grand Duchy began to withdraw towards their camp, with the German knights in hot pursuit. Vitaŭt was in fact carrying out the tactical manoeuvre previously agreed with Jahajla: to break the ranks of the heavily armed knights and scatter them over a wide area.

Quite exceptional bravery at this stage of the battle was shown by the men of the regiments from Smaliensk, Vorša and Amścislaŭ. They had been left by Vitaŭt to cover the right flank of the Polish forces. One of the regiments was wiped out completely and the other two suffered heavy losses, but nevertheless stood their ground. Meanwhile the Teutonic Order's cavalry, in pursuit of an apparently 'fleeing' enemy, was itself cut down. The banners of the Grand Duchy returned to the battlefield and struck from the rear into the crusaders fighting the Polish troops.



Battle of Grunwald.
16th-century engraving from Marcin Bielski's *Kronika wszystkyego swyata*
(Chronicle of the Whole World)



Portrait
of Uladzislaŭ Jahajla.
Illuminated miniature
by Stanisław
Samostrzelnik.
1534

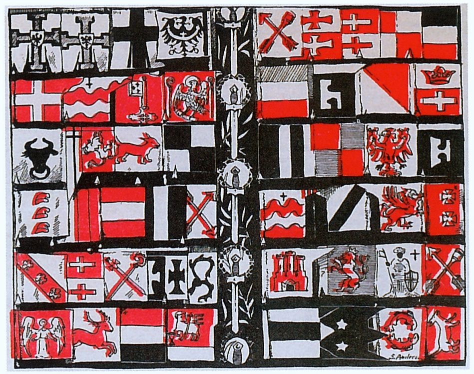
The crushing defeat suffered by the Order meant that it was unable to restore its former power. It soon disappeared as an independent state. The balance of power in Central and Eastern Europe began to shift in favour of the Slavonic states. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania strengthened its independence and gained for itself nearly 100 years of relatively peaceful existence.

It was not long before the troops of the Grand Master and the right flank of the Teutonic Order's army found themselves completely encircled and trapped. The Order's main forces were utterly destroyed in fierce fighting. All the senior officers of the Order perished, including Grand Master Ulrich von Jungingen himself, who met his end at the hands of one of Vitaŭt's warriors.

A very high price was paid for the victory at Grunwald (Belarusian chronicles call it the Battle of Dubroŭna, German sources refer to it as the Battle of Tannenberg). Half of the troops brought in by Vitaŭt never returned home. Nevertheless, the triumphant success of the joint armies of the Grand Duchy and Poland was of tremendous political significance. Under the terms of the 1411 Peace of Toruń (Thorn), the Order was compelled to restore all the territories it had seized, and to pay 300,000 ducats to the victors. Two hundred years of eastward aggression by the German knights had been brought to an end.

Vitaŭt did not, however, wish to crush the Teutonic Order once and for all. To have done so would have meant strengthening Poland and thereby endangering the independence of the Grand Duchy.

Knights' banners,
captured by the victors
at the Battle of Grunwald.
From *Grunwald 1410–1910*.
Warsaw. 1910



THE STRUCTURE OF THE STATE



The state coat of arms of the Grand Duchy was the *Pahonia*. Side of a stone tile from Polacak used for labelling goods

The highest state institutions

The supreme authority in the state was the Grand Duke or, as he was still called, *Haspadar* (the Sovereign). In the times of Hiedzimin, Aĺhierd and Vitaŭt the Sovereign's power was considered to be unlimited.



Viĺnia, the capital city of the Grand Duchy. 16th-century engraving

The most important task of the Grand Duke was to defend the realm. He led his troops, declared war and signed peace treaties. He also decided who was to occupy offices of state, promulgated laws, had charge of the State Treasury and conducted diplomatic relations with other states.

However, by the end of the 15th century the unrestricted authority of the Grand Duke had already been consigned to history. The Grand Duke's Privy Council was by this time becoming increasingly powerful. The members of the Council held the highest offices of state. At first the Council had been no more than an advisory body for the Sovereign, but from 1492 it came to acquire both legislative and executive authority. This was the year in which Grand Duke Aliaksandr (Alexander Jagiellonian, Aleksander Jagiełłończyk)



Coronation. 16th-century miniature

CHRONOLOGY

1492–1506 – reign of Grand Duke Aliaksandr
1506–1548 – reign of Grand Duke Žyhimont the Old
1548–1572 – reign of Žyhimont Aŭhust

Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 16th century before the 1569 Union of Lublin

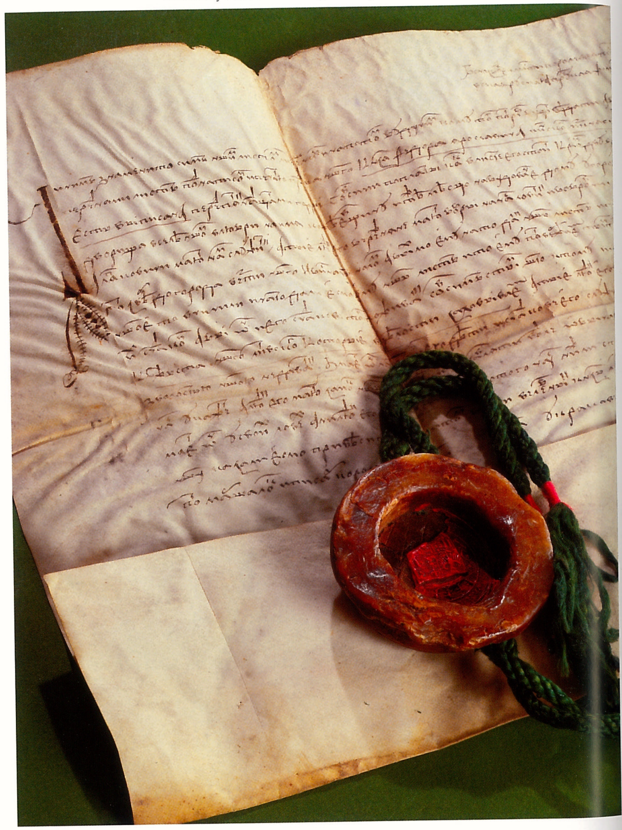


promulgated a decree stating that the Sovereign could conduct foreign policy only after agreeing it with the Council. The Grand Duke no longer had the right to appoint individuals to any office of state or to dismiss them without the consent of the Council. The Council's influence also extended to financial matters.



Grand Duke Švidryhajla.
Fragment of an engraving
from *Sarmatiae Europeae descriptio*
by Alessandro Guagnini. 1581

Grand Ducal deed conferring upon a nobleman
from Davyd-Haradok the right to trap beavers. 1524



State officials
of the Grand Duchy.
Engravings. 1594



Padskarbi (Treasurer)



Maršalak (Marshal)

The Grand Duchy of Lithuania could be called a parliamentary monarchy, in which the power of the Sovereign was limited by a Parliament consisting of two Chambers, the Council and the Diet.

Ducat
struck in the reign
of Žyhimont Aŭhust.
Obverse and reverse.
1547



The Council comprised 45 members. They included the *maršalak* (Marshal – the highest official, who ran the monarch's court and presided in the Diet) the Bishop of Vilnia, *vajavody* (palatines – governors of the palatinates) and their lieutenants, *kaštaliany* (castellans), the *kanclier* (Grand Chancellor – head of the Grand Ducal Chancellery and Keeper of the Great Seal of State), the *padskarbi* (Treasurer – head of the State Treasury), the Hetmans (chief military commanders), the *pisary* (notaries of the Grand Ducal Chancellery) and other high officials of the state. Only really wealthy individuals could hold

Medal struck in honour
of Mikalaj Radzivil 'the Black',
member of the Council
under Žyhimont Aŭhust.
Silver. Obverse. 1563

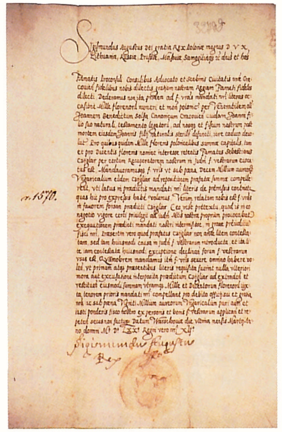


the offices that entitled them to a seat in the Privy Council. This meant first and foremost members of such renowned clans as the Astrožski, Chadkievič, Chraptovič, Halšanski, Haštaŭt (Haštold), Hliabovič, Hlinski, Ilinič, Kiška, Pac, Radzivil (Radziwiłł), Sapieha and Soltan families.

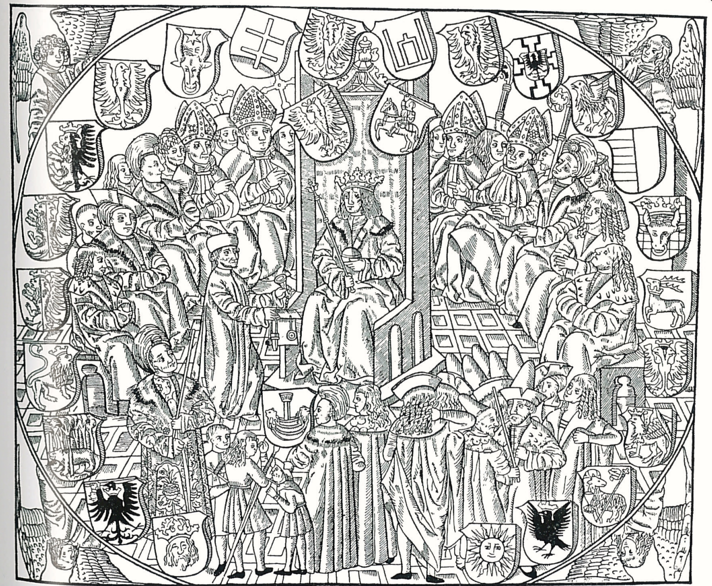
Seats on the Council were ranked in order, according to the importance of the post held. The front bench was reserved for the Bishop of Vilnia, the palatines and castellans of Troki and Vilnia. These were the people who exerted the most influence over state affairs; they often met separately and adopted resolutions on behalf of the Council as a whole.

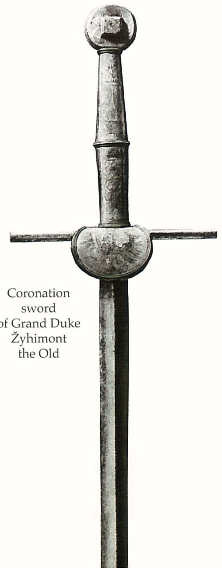
The other supreme body of state was the Diet. It consisted of the Councillors, numerous officials from various state institutions and the nobility from all over the Grand Duchy. Initially all members of the nobility were invited to sessions of the Diet, but there were simply too many of them for business to be conducted effectively. Later on it became common practice for the county dietines to elect two deputies each to attend the national Diet of the Grand Duchy.

Charter granted to the High Court
of the Grand Duchy
by Žyhimont Aŭhust. 1570



King of Poland
and Grand Duke of Lithuania Aliaksandr
at a session of the Polish Senate.
Engraving by Jan Heller.
From the Łaski Statute.
Kraków. 1506





Coronation
sword
of Grand Duke
Žyhimont
the Old

Žyhimont the Old.
Silver medal.
Obverse. 1538



The Diet considered matters of crucial importance to the state: the election of a Grand Duke, declaration of war, alliances with other countries, the number of men to be provided by magnates for military service and the amount of tax to be collected for military purposes, legislation and the functioning of the judicial system. Sessions of the Diet were generally held in the capital, Vilnia, but there were times when it met in other cities as well, *eg* Horadnia, Novaharodak and Bieraście.

Local government

The Grand Duchy was divided into palatinates headed by palatines. It was their job to deal with all the economic, financial, military and judicial issues that arose on the territory under their control. The armed forces of a palatinate were commanded by a castellan. A *padvajavoda* (vice-palatine) was in charge of the palatinate chancellery. There was a *haradničy* (clerk of works) to ensure that the fortifications of the palatine's castle were kept in good order. Overseeing service obligations and the collection of taxes was the task of the *kliučnik* (steward). The *loŭčy* (master of the hunt) and the *liaśničy* (verderer) were responsible for the forests. The palatinate stables were managed by a *stajnik* (equerry). The palatinates were further subdivided into *paviety* (counties); in charge of the administration of a county was a *starasta* (elder). It was the job of *civuny* (sheriffs), *sotniki* (commanders of militia units) and *prystavy* (constables) to ensure that his orders were carried out.

The territories of Polacak and Viciebsk continued to enjoy a considerable measure of autonomy within the Grand Duchy. The offices of clerk of works, steward, verderer and equerry could be held only by people born locally. Senior noblemen and townsmen were obliged to attend sessions of the palatinate courts of Polacak and Viciebsk, which was not the case elsewhere in the Grand Duchy. The Grand Duke appointed the Polacak and Viciebsk palatines 'according to the wishes' of the people living there.

State officials
of the Grand Duchy.
Engravings. 1594



Padkamory
(Chamberlain)



Starasta (Elder)



Vajavoda (Palatine)



Grand Duke Žyhimont the Old
pursued a policy of treating all the nobility
equally, irrespective of their religion.
16th-century engraving



Drawings of seals
used by Vitaŭt the Great
at various times
during his reign



Grand Duke Žyhimont Aŭhust.
Engraving. 1554

The 'Golden Age'

A provision of the 1413 Horodło Union barring anyone professing the Orthodox faith from sitting on the Privy Council was rescinded later on in the first half of the 15th century. The Orthodox Prince Kanstancin Astrožski was appointed Palatine of Troki and was thereby entitled to a seat on the front bench of the Council. He was later joined by another Orthodox, Ryhor Chadkievič, Castellan of Troki.

Grand Duke Žyhimont (Sigismund I, Zygmunt I) the Old, who ascended the throne in 1506, followed a policy of unifying the nobility as a whole, irrespective of origin and religion. He was well-known as a promoter of learning and patron of the arts. Žyhimont Aŭhust (Sigismund II Augustus, Zygmunt II August), son of Žyhimont the Old and Bona Sforza of the Medici family, continued the same policy. He put his signature to a decree setting out the criteria for making appointments to state office: service to the Grand Duchy and ability, rather than religion or origin.



Kryŭda, coat of arms first recorded in the 16th century (the Chmara, Čarnocki, Davuski, Lapa, Maniuška and Suchadolski families)

The Grand Duchy of Lithuania was for Europe a model of a state in which people of different nationalities and religions lived together in peace. This undoubtedly assisted the great cultural developments of the 16th and early 17th centuries in the history of Belarus, a period that has come to be called the 'Golden Age'.



Mother of God
Hodegetria of Smaliensk.
Belarusian school
of icon painting.
16th century

Goblet. Silver-gilt.
16th century.
Found in a hoard
near Bieraście



RURAL LIFE IN THE 14TH AND 15TH CENTURIES



The noble coat of arms *Hipacentaŭr* was used by the old princely Halšanski family. Many of its members held high offices of state and owned vast tracts of land in Belarus and Ukraine

Hereditary and service nobility

Land in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was divided into private and state holdings. The principal owner of state lands was the Grand Duke himself. Thier area grew largely as the result of the incorporation of new territories. Income derived from them went into the state coffers.

The private lands belonged to the class of landowners. They had the right to sell, give as gift or exchange their property. The development of feudal relations led to an increase in the amount of privately owned land. In the process some huge landholdings were created.

Many of the landowners bore the title of 'prince'. Here are the surnames of some of these princely families: Radzivil, Sapieha, Haĺšanski, Slucki, Drucki, Tyškievič, Chadkievič, Astrožski, Alieĺkavič. In the second half of the 14th century the title *pan* (nobleman, squire) became attached to the owners of large landed estates. The term was eventually extended to cover other landowners as well. The very wealthiest landowners came to be called 'magnates'.

People who received land in return for military service were called *bajary*. In effect the land was leased to them on a temporary basis, but there were two ways in which they could acquire it as a patrimony (*ie* property that they could bequeath to their heirs): either after a sufficient length of military service or by buying it outright.

Regaining Ukrainian territories from the Tatars and more than a hundred years of fighting the crusaders led to the emergence of a numerous estate that did military service. They were called *šliachta* (the nobility or gentry).



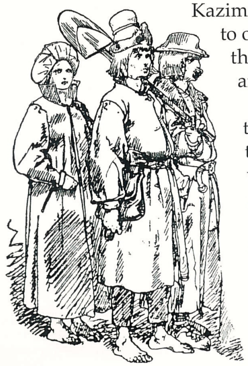
Corvée – working for the landowner. 16th-century engraving

Depending on the level of their obligation to the landlord, peasants were divided into two types: those who were permitted move from one lord to another, and those who were permanently tied to the land where they worked. In the 15th century peasants with the right to move were still more numerous.

Peasants (villeins)

Peasants constituted by far the majority of the population of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Over time they gradually lost the right to own the land that they had been working since time immemorial. In 1447 Grand Duke Kazimir (Casimir IV Jagiellonian, Kazimierz IV Jagiełłończyk) issued a charter guaranteeing the rights of the noblemen to own their land outright, and granting them permission to exercise authority over the people living on their land. Peasants could also become dependent on the state and on the monasteries, both large landowners.

In return for the right to work their plots of land, peasants were compelled to fulfil certain duties for the landowner. Peasants were divided into two types: those who performed *corvée* (work on the land) for the landowner and those who worked in the landowner's household. The *corvée* peasants paid tribute in kind: grain, meat, honey and other foodstuffs. In the 15th century a form of payment in money also appeared, the *abrok* (quit-rent). The peasants working in the landowner's household served as grooms, gardeners, cobblers, carpenters, huntsmen and so on. These obligations were called *panščyna* (villein service). *Corvée* peasants were sometimes expected to perform both villein service and pay quit-rent. Additional burdens were placed on the dependent serfs, *eg* building fortifications, repairing bridges, transporting goods and laying roads.



Peasants in 15th-century dress. Based on a drawing by Jan Matejko



Fragment of a mediaeval folding icon with depictions of saints. Carving on bone





Beekeeping. Tending the orchard. Engravings of the first half of the 16th century

By contrast with other European countries the nobility of the Grand Duchy constituted a numerically very significant part of the population. In the 17th century approximately one in ten inhabitants of the state could claim membership of the class of nobility. Over time the term *bajaryn* was replaced by *šliachcič* (nobleman, a member of the *šliachta* class of nobility or gentry). By the end of the 15th century all males liable for military service were included in the *šliachta*.



Haymaking. Engraving of the first half of the 16th century



15th-century peasants. Old drawing



Hrabli coat of arms (the Čarniaŭski, Dabravoĺski, Lipski, Ščuka, Vyšynski families)

Hunting. Engraving of the first half of the 16th century



Other estates

Apart from the nobility and peasants, the society of the day also comprised townspeople and the clergy. Like the nobility, such people also enjoyed personal freedom. Tatars and Jews living in the Grand Duchy ranked alongside them. The nobility remained the most privileged class of society for several centuries. Noble families had their own coats of arms.



Money pots of the 16th and 17th centuries



Coat of arms borne by the Skaryna family of Rečyca county

BELARUSIAN TOWNS AND THE MAGDEBURG LAW



Key from mediaeval Horadnia

Most urban settlements were not very big, with populations not exceeding 2,000–3,000. There were, however, some quite sizeable towns with over 10,000 inhabitants, such as Mahilioŭ, Viciebsk, Bieraście, Miensk and Pinsk. Before the Livonian War the chief town of Belarus was Polacak, which in terms of wealth and population exceeded even Vilnia itself.

Town dwellers were mostly merchants and craftsmen, the nobility and their servants. People who lived in towns were called *mieścičy* or *miaščanie*, words derived from *miesta*, which in Old Belarusian meant 'town'. Townspeople frequently had to suffer the heavy-handed actions of the Grand Duke's lieutenants and were eager to establish a way of governing their own affairs. The Magdeburg Law provided an ideal means for doing precisely this.

There were 83 towns in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania by 1500. In the 16th century the already established towns began to grow rapidly and new ones were emerging. We know from historical records that the Grand Duchy of Lithuania had as many as 530 towns at this time.

The Magdeburg Law

The Magdeburg Law essentially means the right of a town to govern itself, *ie* it was a form of autonomy. It first developed in the German city of Magdeburg in the 13th century and afterwards spread rapidly throughout Europe.

In Belarus it was the Grand Dukes who issued charters granting the Magdeburg Law. Vilnia was the first city to receive such a charter, in 1387. Autonomy entitled a town to its own coat of arms.



In a cobbler's workshop. Miniature. 1505



Seal of Polacak. 1404. Rubbing



Tanner at work. Early 16th-century miniature



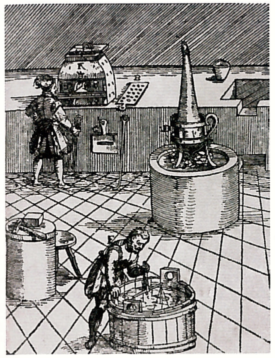
Coat of arms of Mazyr, from the charter granting the town the Magdeburg Law. 17th century

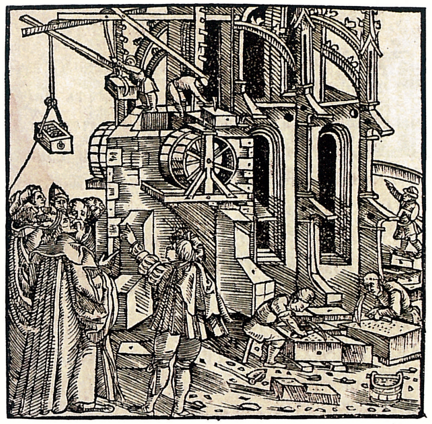
CHRONOLOGY

Years in which Belarusian cities and towns were granted the Magdeburg Law:

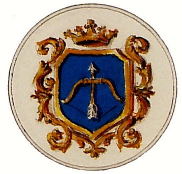
- 1387 – Vilnia
- 1390 – Bieraście
- 1391 – Horadnia
- c 1400 – Troki
- 1430 – Bielsk
- 1440 – Suraž
- 1441 – Slucak
- 1493 – Bransk
- 1498 – Polacak
- 1498 – Darahičyn
- 1499 – Miensk

Minting money. Engraving of the time





King Solomon building the Temple in Jerusalem. This engraving from Francišak Skaryna's translation of the Third Book of Kings gives us some idea of mediaeval building techniques. Prague. 1518



Coat of arms of Bieraście. Drawing of the first half of the 19th century

The town was governed by an elected magistracy consisting of two 'chambers' – the *rada* (Council) and the *lava* (Bench). The Council exercised direct authority in the city, dealing with all civil cases. The Bench dealt with criminal offences. Members of both the Council and the Bench were elected annually. Presiding over the Council was an elected *burmistr* (mayor); the Grand Duke appointed a *vojt* (bailiff) to chair the Bench. It was customary for the bailiff to swear on the cross that he would faithfully serve the city.



Coat of arms of Vilnia, the capital city of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania

Engraved map of Vilnia by Georg Braun and Franz Hohenberg. 1581





Impression of a seal depicting the Vilnia coat of arms. 15th or 16th centuries

The majority of Belarusian towns were granted the Magdeburg Law. It freed the citizens from feudal dues and from the jurisdiction and authority of state officials.



Horadnia. Engraving by Matthias Zündt. 1568

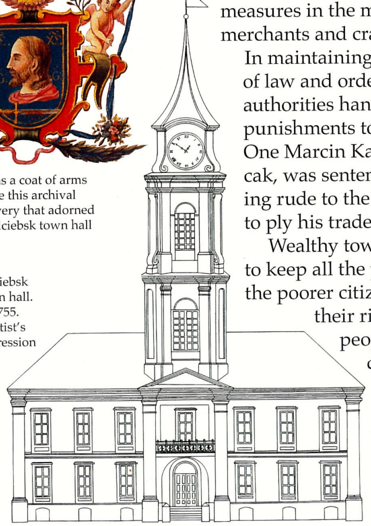
Special buildings – *ratušy* (town halls) – were provided for the magistracy and other local authorities. Town halls accommodated the chancellery, the town treasury and archives, where all the charters granted to the city were preserved. The magistracy collected taxes, checked the accuracy of weights and measures in the market and generally defended the interests of the town's merchants and craftsmen.

In maintaining their role as guardians of law and order, the municipal authorities handed down severe punishments to any transgressors. One Marcin Kakorka, a citizen of Polacak, was sentenced to 40 lashes for being rude to the mayor, and forbidden to ply his trade for a whole year.

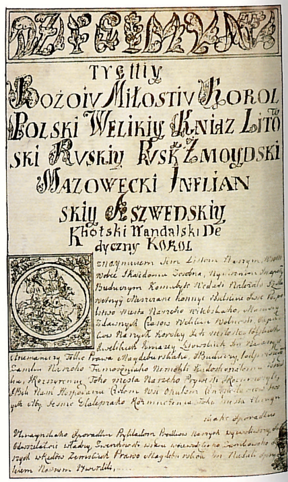
Wealthy townspeople wanted to keep all the power in their hands, the poorer citizens had to fight for their rights. The ordinary people of the town demanded that their deputies should check everything the magistracy did.



It was a coat of arms like this archival discovery that adorned the Viciebsk town hall



Viciebsk town hall. 1755. Artist's impression


TYGtIIY
BOŻOIV MIŁOSTIV KOROL POLSKI WELIKIY KNIAZ LITOWSKI RVSKIY PRVSK ŻMOYDSKI MAZOWECKI INFLIANSKIY ASZWEDSKIY KHOTSKI WANDALSKI DEDYCZNY KOROL

Charter of Grand Duke and King Žyhimont Vaza (Sigismund III Vasa) granting the Magdeburg Law to Viciebsk. 1597

The prevailing atmosphere in towns was liberating for the individual. Serfs who had escaped their owners and settled in towns were afforded protection by the magistracy. They were not forcibly returned to their former owner, no matter what his status – petty nobleman or palatine.



Mahilioŭ. From engraving by Vasil Vaščanka. 1702

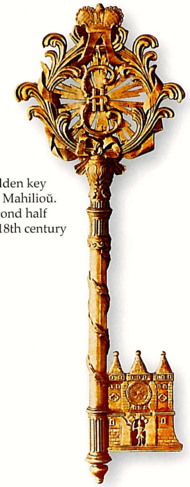


Coat of arms of Mahilioŭ, in use until 1661



Tile depicting the Slucak coat of arms

We know from archival documents that on one occasion a meeting took place in Polacak of 'all three sessions of magistrates and the common people' where a proposal was made that the municipal authorities should consult with all the inhabitants of the city when assessing tax liabilities, and, when collecting the taxes, '[they should] ensure that taxes were taken from all, from the highest members of the town council down to the lowliest citizen, from rich and poor alike, without corruption of any kind as was hitherto the case'.



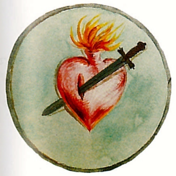
Golden key from Mahilioŭ. Second half of the 18th century



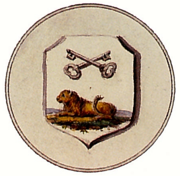
Navahradak Castle. Drawing of what it may have looked like by Viktar Staščaniuk

To defend their interests against competition, craftsmen joined together in craft guilds. These were, in effect, mediaeval trade unions.

Coats of arms of Belarusian towns. Drawing of the first half of the 19th century. Left to right



Hieraniony



Lida



Barysaŭ



Haradnaja



Navahradak

Coats of arms
of Belarusian towns.
Impressions of seals on paper



Bieraście



Horadnia



Miensk



Councillors
representing
the craft guilds
at a session
of the magistracy.
Modern drawing



Polychrome wall tile
from Mir Castle.
First half of the 17th century

Craft guilds

Most townspeople were craftsmen of some kind. There were dozens of different specialisations in the Belarusian towns of the time. There were more than 80 of them in Mahilioŭ alone, including armourers, metal founders, goldsmiths, stonemasons, tilemakers, woodcarvers, tailors, hatters, hosiers, cordwainers, coppersmiths and brewers.

A craftsman who was not a member of his professional association (guild) was not permitted to sell his goods in the town market. There were other privileges associated with guild membership. The Polacak magistracy conferred on the city's guild of tanners and furriers the right to seize goods from any craftsmen who were not members of the guild and to put those individuals in prison.



14th–15th-century craft guilds and fraternities.
Drawing by Jan Matejko



Coat of arms
of the United
Craft Guild
of Clockmakers,
Armourers,
Blacksmiths
and Locksmiths.
1770



Cinquedea. 15th century.
Italian swords frequently
served as models
for master armourers
to demonstrate their craft.
Modern replica
by the Belarusian
armoury workshop *Koŭnia*



Emblem
of the Grandmaster
of the Horadnia Guild
of Potters, Carpenters
and Stonemasons.
17th century

The craft guilds had a complex hierarchical structure. At the top were the grandmasters, beneath them the senior and junior master craftsmen. Then came the journeymen, and right at the bottom were the apprentices. Anyone wishing to climb this ladder had first of all to have a document proving that he was of legitimate birth. Then followed years of learning and payment of dues. Finally a journeyman wishing to be admitted to a guild as a master had to submit himself for examination, *ie* 'produce a masterpiece'. For example, a blacksmith was expected to make a horseshoe, a cutlass and a battleaxe, a locksmith would have to create complicated locks for a shop and a chest, all under the watchful eyes of the best professionals. The candidate was allowed three attempts to pass the examination. In addition anyone wishing to be admitted to a guild had to be 'married and of good repute', and not 'a drunkard or dice player'.



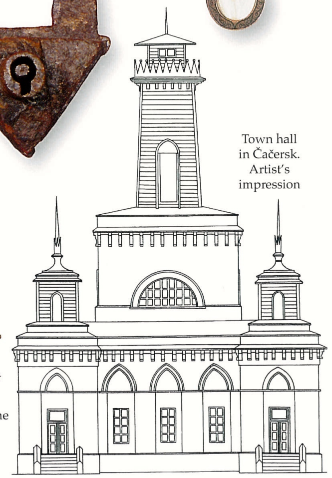
Icon of the Virgin and Child.
Silver-gilt, embossed, engraved.
By master goldsmith from Slucak.
17th century



17th-century padlocks
from Miensk



Mediaeval
town musicians.
Drawing of the time

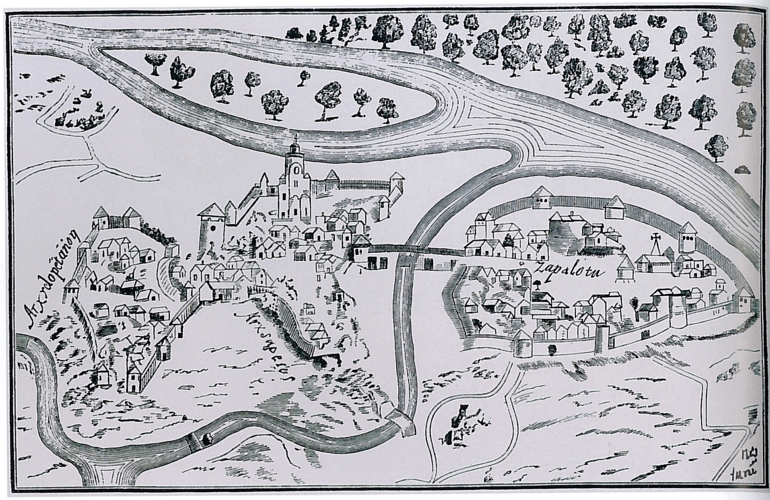


Town hall
in Čačersk.
Artist's
impression

Coat of arms of Polacak.
Impression of the city seal
of the late 16th
or early 17th centuries



The favourable geographical position of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania facilitated trade with Poland, the Baltic region, Bohemia, Germany, Hungary, Muscovy and other countries.



Polacak. From engraving by Stanislaŭ Pachalavicki. 1579

Trade

Merchants whose primary occupation was trade also formed guilds.

The most important traditional exports from Belarus were wax and furs. Other goods exported to Europe included wood, coal, leather, pork fat, resin, tar, pitch, hops and – from the late 15th century – grain (the main export item), flax, hemp and iron. Goods imported from abroad for sale in Belarus included cloth of all kinds, from the coarse types to the finest silk, as well as copper, lead, tin, salt, wine and spices. Towns also traded with the rural areas where the products of town craftsmen were needed.



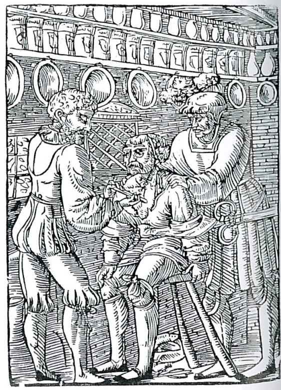
Kryžastrel
coat of arms borne
by the Źmiečaroŭski
family



Silver goblet
of the late 16th
or early 17th centuries.
From a hoard
unearthed in Stradziec,
Bieraście district



Mediaeval apothecary's shop.
16th-century woodcut



Barber's shop. 16th-century woodcut

Seal of the Vilnia
Surgeons' Guild.
1522. Rubbing



Fairs took place in all towns once or twice a week. The market took up a lot of space. In Mahilioŭ, for instance, the market contained some four hundred shops and stalls.

As in previous centuries, the river Dźvina continued to serve as the main trade artery in the Grand Duchy.



Coat of arms
of the Miensk Carpenters
and Wheelwrights' Guild



Bookshop. 16th-century engraving

Portugal,
coin worth ten ducats,
minted during the reign
of Žyhimont Aŭhust.
Obverse and reverse.
1562



Both in appearance and in way they were run Belarusian towns were very similar to towns elsewhere in the Europe of the time. To the east of Belarus, *ie* in Muscovy and later in the Russian Empire, the Magdeburg Law was unheard of. The outdated feudal system still held sway.

Buying
and selling herrings
in the town market.
Old drawing





Seal of the Vilnia
Tailors' Guild.
16th–17th centuries

THE BELARUSIAN PEOPLE



Belarusian noblewoman.
Modern replica
of a 16th-century outfit

The Grand Duchy of Lithuania, in which Belarusian was the official state language, created the necessary preconditions for the Belarusian people to become a modern nation.

The Baltic tribes that were the first to settle the territory of modern Belarus were gradually absorbed by the Slavonic newcomers. This was the precondition for the creation of the Belarusian people and language. The Balts adopted the Slavs' higher level of civilisation, but also infused many features of their own into the new mix.

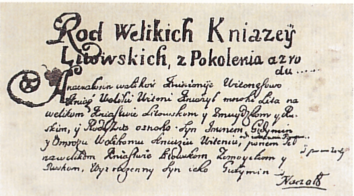
The three earlier tribal groups – the Kryvičians, Dryhavičians and Radzimičians – formed the ethnic base of the Belarusian people. Their language and customs comprised both Slavonic and Baltic elements.

By the 16th century the people of the area were called Litvins (in the sense of 'citizens of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania') or Ruthenians. The second of these two terms was used when it was necessary to emphasise their adherence to the Orthodox Christian faith.

The inhabitants of different parts of the Grand Duchy called themselves by different names. People living in the eastern part of Belarus, in the basins of the Dźvina and Dnieper, were known collectively as Ruś, or individually as Ruthenians and later as Bielaruscy or Belarusians. The people of Palieśsie were called Paliašuks. People living in the west of Belarus went by the name of Litvins, a term still in use in the 19th century.



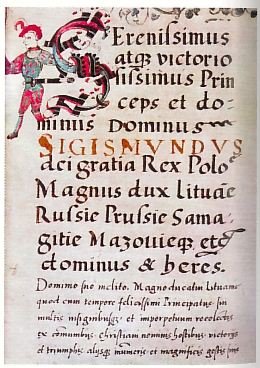
Junaša coat of arms (the Arloŭski, Baroŭski, Bialinski, Dabravolski, Dubroŭski, Hadlieŭski, Hlinski, Hrachoŭski, Jankoŭski, Kamienski, Kavalieŭski, Lisoŭski, Paŭloŭski, Stefanoŭski, Šuškievič, Volski, Zaliŭski, Zaluski, Zavadski, Žukoŭski and other families)



Rod Welikich Kniazey Litowskich, z Pokolenia a z rodu....

Fragment of the *Chronika Bychaŭca*, the most complete record of the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, written in Old Belarusian using the Latin script in the first half of the 16th century





Serenissimus atq; victoriosissimus Princeps et dominus Dominus SIGISMVNDVS dei gratia Rex Polonie Magnus dux Lituanie Russie Prussie Samagitie Mazouieq; etc dominus & heres.

Fragment of a Grand Ducal charter granting freedoms to the Jews of the Grand Duchy

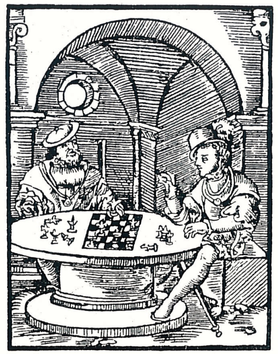
Kazimir, son of Grand Duke Kazimir Jahajlavič. Canonised soon after his death and now revered by the Catholic Church as the patron of Vilnia and the protector of the lands of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania. 1520

Merchants from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. 16th-century German drawing





Nativity of the Mother of God. Belarusian school of iconography. 1649



Playing chess. 16th-century engraving



Replica of an unglazed wall tile depicting a man in Renaissance costume. Late 16th century. Zaslaŭje Castle. Tiles such as this were modelled on foreign engravings and used to adorn the stoves of the nobility and wealthy townsfolk



Townswomen's dresses of the 16th century. Modern replicas

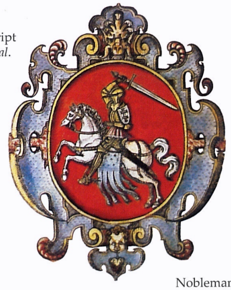


Belarusian glazed cornice tile with heraldic emblem. 17th century

Heraldic emblems on a terracotta tile from Mir Castle. First half of the 17th century



Pahonia coat of arms, from a manuscript *General Armorial*. 1575





Nobleman and noblewoman. Modern replicas of mediaeval dress

Letter from Grand Duke Žyhimont the Old to the abbot of the Kobryń Monastery of the Holy Saviour



The neighbouring peoples – the Russians, Ukrainians and Poles – used the word 'Litvins' to refer to all the inhabitants of the Grand Duchy. When abroad, Belarusians of the time used to refer to themselves as Litvins, irrespective of the area from which they came or the faith they professed. This was a reflection of their self-identity and allegiance to their state of origin. Documents from Muscovy frequently refer to Litvins from the east of Belarus, *eg* Polacak, Viciebsk, Amścisłaŭ and Vorša, as well as from the west, *eg* Horadnia, Vaŭkavysk or Slonim.

The ancestors of modern Belarusians, irrespective of their place of origin or religion, called themselves Litvins. This demonstrated their sense of national identity and allegiance to their homeland, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Modern replica of a mediaeval nobleman's clothing





Tavern in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. From the *Cosmographia* (Cosmography) of Sebastian Münster. 16th-century woodcut

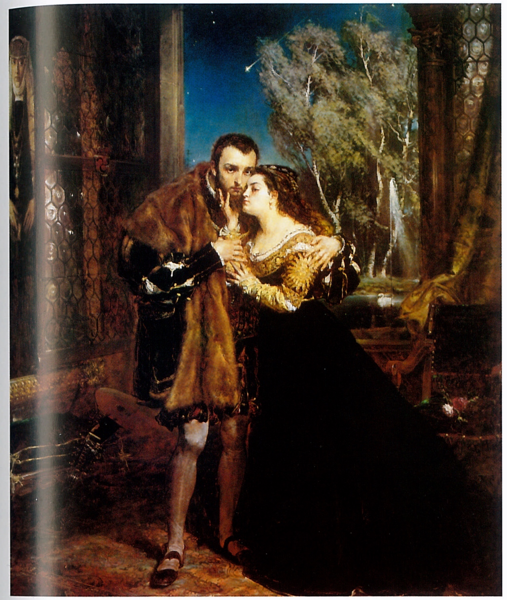


Litvins on skis. Engraving. 1584



Princess Safija Sluckaja endowed Orthodox monasteries and churches and engaged in educational and charitable works. Recognised as one of the community of Belarusian saints. Sculpture by Michaś Inkoŭ. 2000

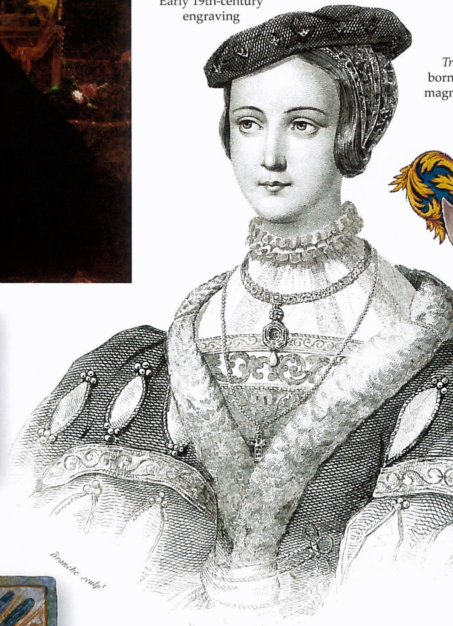
Žyhimont Aŭhust in love with Barbara Radzivil in the courtyard of the Radzivil palace in Vilnia. Painting by Jan Matejko. 1867



Parish Church of Corpus Christi in Niasviž. Built at the end of the 16th century with funds provided by Prince Mikalaj Kryštop Radzivil 'the Orphan'

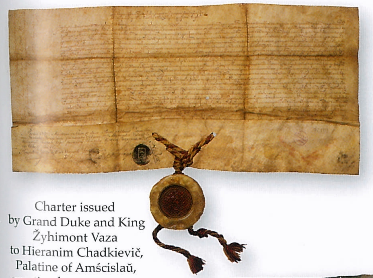


Grand Duchess and Queen Barbara Radzivil. Early 19th-century engraving



Truby coat of arms borne by the renowned magnate Radzivil family





Charter issued by Grand Duke and King Žyhimont Vaza to Hieranim Chadkievič, Palatine of Amścisłaŭ, granting him possession of the Bielavieža Forest. 1595

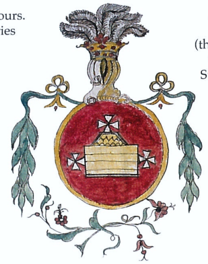
Tile from Mir Castle depicting the Radzivil coat of arms. Late 16th century



It was not until the second half of the 19th century that the word 'Belarus' came to be used with reference to the territory of today's country, and 'Belarusians' to the people who lived there.



Slonim county colours. 16th–18th centuries



Mahila coat of arms (the Bahdanovič, Chackievič, Stankievič and Špakoŭski families)



Portrait of the magnate Hieranim Chryzastom Chadkievič. By an unknown artist of the 17th century

Scholars still debate the origins and meaning of the term *Bielaja* (white) *Ruś*. Some of them associate it with the predominantly white colour of the national dress. Others relate it to the fact that the area was never subjugated by the Mongol-Tatar Horde, as the word 'white' signified freedom and independence. Another possibility is that Christianity was adopted earlier there than elsewhere in the region. In addition colours were used to denote the cardinal directions, white for the east and black for the west.



Ambassadors from Muscovy in Horadnia. Fragment of a 16th-century engraving by Matthias Zündt



Map of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, produced at the behest of Mikalaj Kryštop Radzivil 'the Orphan'. Engraved by Tamaš Makoŭski (Tomasz Makowski) and in 1613 printed in Amsterdam. This map was a major scientific achievement for the Grand Duchy

BELARUSIAN CULTURE IN THE 14TH AND 15TH CENTURIES



Upper Church in Horadnia. 14th – early 15th centuries. Artist's impression



Coat of arms of Kreva. Impression of an 18th-century seal

The Orthodox and Catholic Churches

In the Middle Ages religion was the dominant factor that ruled people's minds and feelings. It permeated all aspects of life, and therefore played an enormously important role in the development of culture.

The vast majority of the Slavonic population of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania at the time were Orthodox by religion. The country had an independent Lithuanian Metropolitanate, which was divided into six Orthodox eparchies with centres in Polacak, Novaharodak, Turaŭ and Pinsk, Volodymyr and Bieraście, Smaliensk and Chernihiv.

Attempts to spread Catholicism among the Belarusians met with little success.

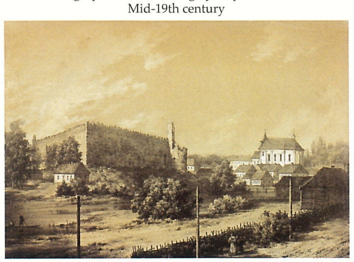
The situation changed after the conclusion of the 1385 Union of Kreva, by which Catholics were granted a number of advantages. A Catholic bishopric was established in Vilnia; Grand Duke and King Jahajla gave the Bishop of Vilnia permission to build Catholic churches. By the mid-16th century there were already more than 250 of them in the Vilnia Palatinate alone. Catholic monastic orders were beginning to appear in Belarus by the end of the 14th century.



St Ann's Church in Vilnia. Photograph by Jazep Čachovič. 1870



Fortified church at Synkavičy, a fine example of Belarusian Gothic style. Late 15th – early 16th centuries



Lida Castle, built in the 1330s, formed part of a line of defence against the Teutonic Knights. Lithograph after a drawing by Napalieon Orda. Mid-19th century

The Orthodox held Saints Eŭfrasińnia of Polacak, Aŭram and Mierkur of Smaliensk, Kiryla of Turaŭ and the Vilnia martyrs Anton, Iaan and Jaŭstach in special veneration.



Vilnia Castle tower. Modern photograph

Architecture

The Romanesque style of church architecture was giving way to the Gothic. The Church of the Holy Trinity in the village of Jiškaldź near Baranavičy is a fine example of the new style. Built in 1472 by Mikalaj Niamirovič, the church has a steep, double-pitched roof, a five-sided apse and a tower with a spiral staircase. The interior is divided by four pillars which support the cross vault.

The frequent wars into which the Grand Duchy was dragged meant that there was a great need for defensive buildings. Stone replaced wood for walls and fortifications.



Gothic Church of the Holy Trinity in Jiškaldź. 1472

West European travellers referred to the Belarus of those days as a 'country of castles'. During the 14th century mighty castles were built in Novaharodak, Kreva, Lida, Viciebsk, Miedniki and Troki.

The Romanesque style continued to predominate in castle construction.

The walls of Kreva Castle were up to 3 metres thick and 13 metres high. In 1394 Lida Castle successfully withstood a heavy siege by English and French knights.



Interior of the Holy Trinity Church in Jiškaldź



Building work on Mir Castle was begun in the late 15th century



Ruins of the castle in Navahradak, the first capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania

Lithographs after drawings by Napalieon Orda. Mid-19th century



Pahonia coat of arms of the Grand Duchy was used on seals and coins, and could be seen on the façades of city gates and town halls. From a *trajak* (three *hrošy*) coin. 1563

Secular portrait painting began to emerge in the 14th and 15th centuries. We know from historical records that the Viciebsk Castle Church once contained a 'portrait of Duchess Ulliana, done in the olden days, where she is shown together with her husband Aĺhierd'.



Icon of Our Lady of Tenderness from Malaryta. Late 14th or early 15th centuries



One of the most holy shrines for Belarusians – the icon of Our Lady, Mother of Mercy, in the Vostraja Brama (Ostra Brama, Aušros Vartai), Viĺnia



Archangel Michael. 1470–1480. Carved wood, gilt. From the Holy Trinity Church in Šarašova, Pružany district

Painting and sculpture

The construction of Orthodox and Catholic churches gave a great boost to the pictorial arts. Many churches of both faiths were decorated with frescoes, as were the royal chambers in Polacak, Viciebsk and Horadnia. Frescoes produced by Belarusian artists have also been preserved in Poland, in the Holy Trinity Chapel of Lublin Castle.



Fragment of the Belarusian-Byzantine fresco in the Castle chapel in Lublin. It depicts Uladzislaŭ Jahajla, who founded the chapel in 1418. By artist Andrej from Viĺnia



Fragment of a Belarusian fresco in the Holy Cross Chapel of Kraków Cathedral. *c* 1470



Mother of God Hodegetria. Belarusian school of iconography. Late 15th or early 16th centuries. Slucak district



Crucifixion. First half of the 17th century. From Halubičy, Hlybokaje district



Fragment of ornate vestments worn by Roman Catholic priests. Late 15th or early 16th centuries. The embroidery is very similar to that of Western Europe at the time. Discovered in the Franciscan Church, Pinsk

Each church was richly decorated with icons. One of the earliest works of Belarusian iconography is the icon of Our Lady of Tenderness, originally from Malaryta, very much in the Byzantine style. By contrast to Orthodox churches, Catholic places of worship were also decorated with painted wooden sculptures of the saints.



St Gregory. 1470–1480. Carved wood, gilt. From Polacak

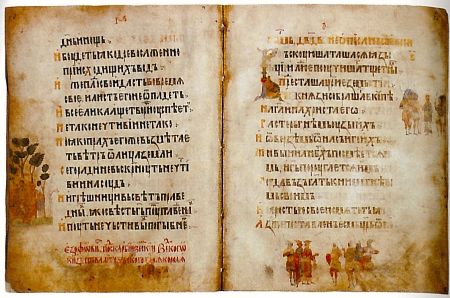




16th-century manuscript book

Treating animal skins. At that time parchment was the primary material on which manuscript books were written. 16th-century engraving

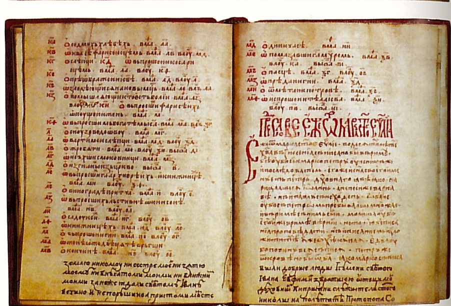
Illustrated Psalter of 1397 with a note written by the owner, 'Jezafovič, treasurer of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania'



The growing might of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was one of the major factors in the upsurge of Belarusian culture. The other major contributing element was the beneficial influence of new trends in Byzantine and West European art.

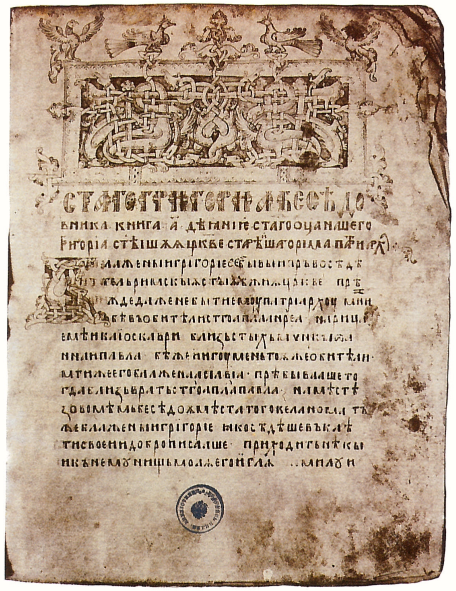
Manuscript books

Book copyists achieved a very high standard of artistic craftsmanship. They adorned the texts they were copying with historiated initials and colourful miniatures. The bindings were decorated with enamel depictions and precious stones.

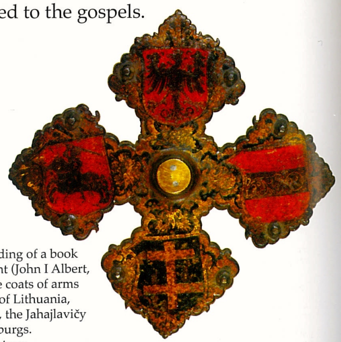


16th-century Gospels from the Monastery of John the Baptist at Vostraŭ in Polacak

In the 14th century the Laŭryš Gospels were copied especially for the monastery of that name near Novaharodak. The manuscript contains a large number of historiated initials and 19 miniatures on topics related to the gospels.



Dialogues of St Gregory. 14th century. Leaf decorated with interlaced motifs and a historiated initial



Decoration on the binding of a book belonging to Jan Olbracht (John I Albert, Jan Olbracht), with the coats of arms of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Kingdom of Poland, the Jahajlavičy and the Habsburgs. Late 15th century



Laŭryš Gospels. Hard binding with decorations. It is thought that the image of the saint actually depicts Grand Duke Vojšalk (monastic name Laŭryš), who in the 13th century founded one of the oldest monasteries in Belarus. It came to be called after him

The silver plate in the centre of the velvet-wrapped upper binding board bears a depiction of a saint with shield and pike. This could well be a representation of the monastery's founder Grand Duke Vojšalk, who took the name Laŭryš when he became a monk.



Decorated letter from the 14th-century Amścislaŭ Gospels



Archangel Michael. Miniature from the Laŭryš Gospels. The original manuscript is kept in the Czartoryski Library in Kraków



Laŭryš Gospels. Miniature depicting St Matthew. On the table in front of him lie the tools of the book copyist's craft

The tradition of recording the history of the state in chronicle form was developing fast in the 15th century. Among the Belarusian chronicles that have survived is one dating back to 1446. It covers the history of the whole Grand Duchy of Lithuania, recording events from the 9th to the mid-15th centuries. The reign of Vitaŭt is described in detail, confirming the important role played by the Grand Duchy in European affairs.

Apart from the Laŭryš Gospels, there are other fine examples of manuscript book artistry from Belarus worthy of mention, such as the 14th-century Smaliensk Psalter and Drucak Gospels and the 15th-century Žyrovičy Gospels.

THE ARMED FORCES OF THE GRAND DUCHY



In battle warriors used their company's banner to orientate themselves and were guided by signals from drummers and trumpeters. From a 16th-century engraving

The levy in mass (a form of general conscription) formed the basis of the armed forces of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 16th century. By law all land-owning males were liable for military service. In addition every nobleman was obliged to provide well-equipped and trained soldiers: one soldier for every eight so-called service units (a service unit was equivalent to two peasant farmholdings). The more land a nobleman possessed, the more soldiers he had to provide. If a petty nobleman possessed no land or serfs, he had to join the army himself.

A General Diet would declare a state of war and call for a levy in mass.



16th-century sword. Modern replica made by the Miensk armoury workshop *Koŭnia*



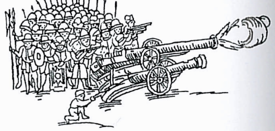
So-called 'German' armour was widely used by the knights of the Grand Duchy. 19th-century replica



Mediaeval Belarusian warrior with an axe. Modern replica based on an old engraving. Miensk knights' club *Kaliumny*



16th-century sword. Modern replica made by the Miensk armoury workshop *Koŭnia*



Cannon, a firearm that first appeared in the Grand Duchy in the 14th century. It radically changed the methods of warfare. Fragment of engraving from *Kronika polska* (The Cronicle of Poland) by Marcin Bielski. 1597



Litvins at war. Artist's impression

The 16th-century Belarusian poet Mikola Husoŭski (Nicolaus Hussovianus) describes in his poem *Carmen de statura, feritate ac venatione bisontis* (Song on the appearance, ferocity and hunting of the bison) how the men of the time trained for military service:

...Raw rustic recruits leave their hovels behind
To train in the camps for the war that is coming,
The Grand Duke himself has ordered their training
On his lands that lie deep in the forest…
On the butts next the village from dawn until dusk
Round and round ride the horsemen with cries of defiance
At the targets they aim their sabres and arrows...



Knight's cuirass, a masterpiece of metalwork. 19th-century replica



15th-century knights. Drawing by Jan Matejko

Once war had been declared the Grand Duke despatched messengers to each county with a universal proclamation announcing the time and place for the levy to gather. Each county put up its own colours. There were special officials to maintain order in a county which would otherwise have stood abandoned whenever the nobility and the levy left for war.

All the county colours of a palatinate would be brought together under the command of a castellan. The Hetman would then take charge of the army of the Grand Duchy as a whole.



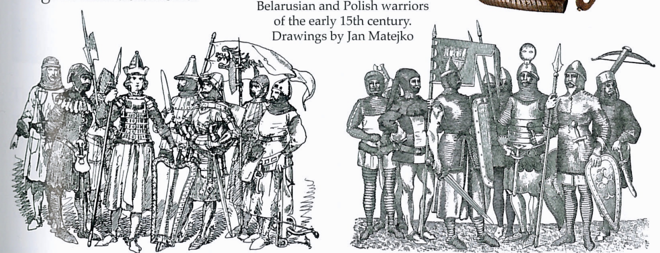
Special combination of war hammer and pike

The warriors of the Grand Duchy had at their disposal both firearms – hand culverins and arquebuses – and cold weapons – double-edged swords, single-edged backswords, rapiers, sabres and daggers. Body armour and helmets defended them from enemy bullets and blows. Wide use was made of longbows, crossbows and light shields.

Belarusian knights earned glory for themselves at the Battle of Grunwald and in the Hussite wars, where they fought on the side of the Bohemians. Among the collections of the Vienna Historical Museum is the parade armour of the Radzivil cousins, Mikalaj 'the Red' and Mikalaj 'the Black', decorated with enamel and gold incrustations.



16th-century knight's close helm with lock. 19th-century replica



Belarusian and Polish warriors of the early 15th century. Drawings by Jan Matejko



Belarusian infantryman of the 16th century. Artist's impression by Uladzimir Kisly



The coats of arms of the nobility were symbols of knighthood. The *Pahonia* coat of arms made it absolutely clear that the main task of the nobility was to defend their country



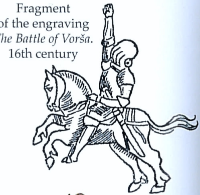
Belarusian warriors. Fragment of the engraving *The Battle of Vorša*. 16th century



'Italian' armour was well-known in Belarus, too. 19th-century replica



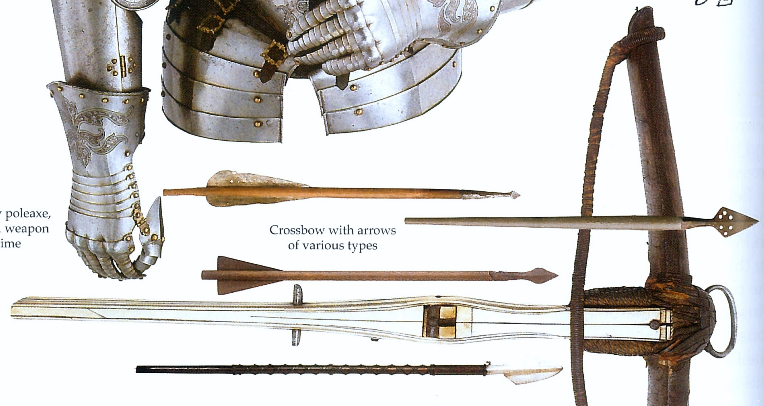
Defender of the Grand Duchy. Modern replica, made by the knights' club *Kaliumny*



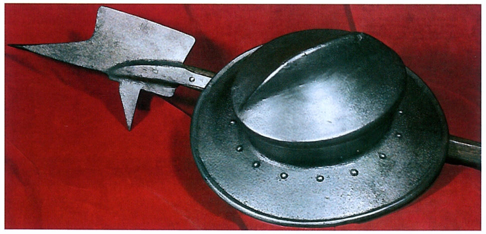
Call to battle. Fragment of the engraving *The Battle of Vorša*. 16th century



16th-century poleaxe, a traditional weapon of the time



Crossbow with arrows of various types



15th-century helmet ('kettle hat') and halberd of a foot soldier



Military formations on the battlefield. Engraving from Marcin Bielski's *Kronika wszystkyego swyata*. 1564

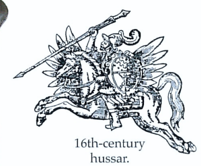
In addition to its cavalry and infantry, the army of the Grand Duchy was famed for its artillery. By the middle of the 16th century there was a foundry in Vilnia that was famous throughout Europe and could produce 18 iron shot-firing cannon in a day.



16th-century sword with coiled hand guard. Modern replica made by the Miensk armoury workshop *Kolinia*



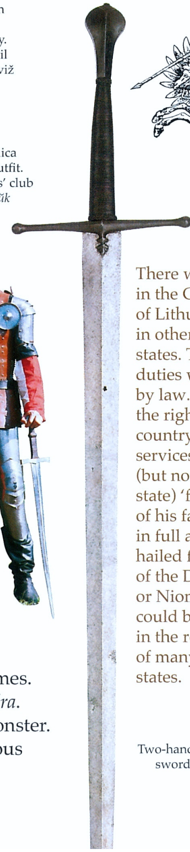
Portrait of a man in armour. Mid-17th century. From the Radzivil collection in Niasviž



16th-century hussar. Engraving of the time



Modern replica of soldier's outfit. Polacak knights' club *Žaliezny voŭk*

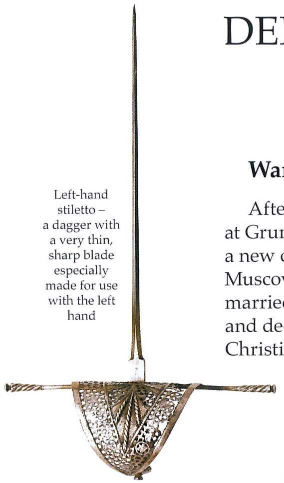


Two-handed sword

There were knights in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania just as in other European states. Their rights and duties were defined by law. A knight had the right to leave his country to offer his services elsewhere (but not in an enemy state) 'for the increase of his fame'. Warriors in full armour who hailed from the banks of the Dźvina, Dnieper or Nioman rivers could be found in the royal courts of many European states.

There was another well-known foundry in Niasviž. Many of the cannon made in these foundries were of unique design and even bore their own names. One of the cannon produced by the iron founders in Niasviž was called *Hydra*. It was cast in the shape of an antique column depicting the multi-headed monster. A cannon called *Owl* had the shape of an octagonal pillar bearing the ominous inscription, 'The owl heralds death.'

DEFENCE OF THE REALM



Left-hand stiletto – a dagger with a very thin, sharp blade especially made for use with the left hand

Wars with Muscovy

After the victory over the Teutonic Order at Grunwald the Grand Duchy of Lithuania faced a new danger from the east – the increasingly powerful Muscovite state. Grand Duke Ivan III of Muscovy married the daughter of the last Emperor of Byzantium and declared himself the protector of all Orthodox Christians in Eastern Europe. This claim led him to demand that Grand Duke Kazimir of Lithuania should hand over to him 'the cities of Polacak, Viciebsk, Smaliensk and all the other lands of Ruthenia'.

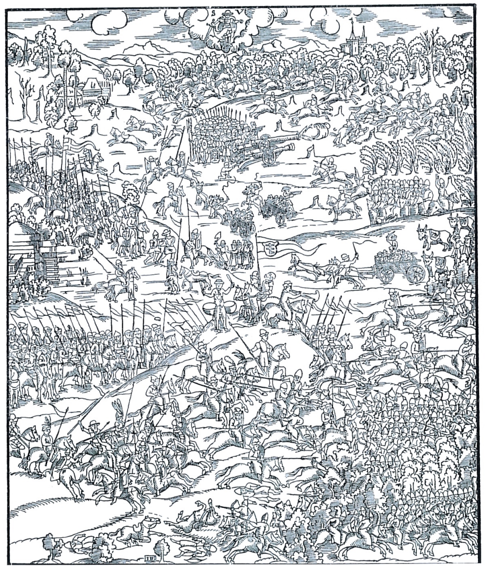


The reign of Grand Duke Aliaksandr marked the beginning of 300 years of Muscovite aggression against the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Fragment of an engraving from Alessandro Guagnini's *Sarmatiae Europeae descriptio*. 1581

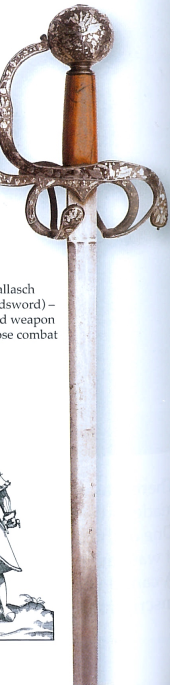
The first war between Muscovy and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania began in 1492. The Muscovite military commanders succeeded in capturing large areas of the Grand Duchy.



Grand Duke Vassilii III of Muscovy planned to seize Viciebsk, Polacak and other Belarusian lands. 16th-century engraving



Forces of the Grand Duchy beat off a raid by Crimean Tatars. Engraving of 1597



Pallasch (broadsword) – a hand weapon for close combat



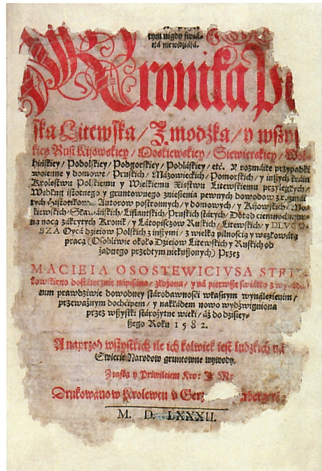
Muscovite warrior. From a 16th-century engraving

CHRONOLOGY

c 1460–1530 – life of Kanstancin Astrožski
1492 – first war between Muscovy and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania
1500 – Battle on the river Viadroša
6 August 1506 – defeat of the Tatars at Kliecak
8 September 1514 – victory at Vorša

Žyhimont the Old, Grand Duke of Lithuania. Painting by Marcello Bacciarelli. Late 18th or early 19th centuries




MACIEIA OSOSTEWICIVSA STRY
M. D. LXXXII.

Title folio of *Kronika Polska, Litewska, Żmódzka y wszystkiej Rusi* by Maciej Stryjkoŭski. In this work, the first printed history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the author pays particular attention to the military events of the period. 1582

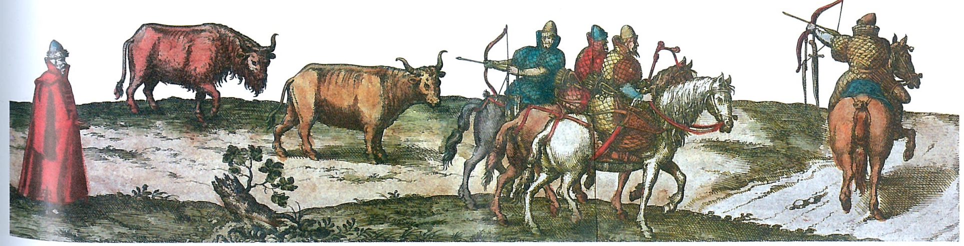
Kazimir's son, Grand Duke Aliaksandr, had no wish to go to war with his aggressive neighbour and attempted to make peace with Muscovy by marrying Ivan III's daughter, Princess Aliena. However, this dynastic marriage failed to secure peace.

On 14 July 1500, near the river Viadroša in the Smaliensk region, Grand Hetman Kanstancin Astrožski with only 4,500 men under his command engaged a 40,000-strong Muscovite army. The men of the Grand Duchy fought bravely in defence of their country's frontiers, but the enemy was too strong. Almost all of them perished and the Hetman himself was taken prisoner. As a result of the defeat the Grand Duchy of Lithuania lost 19 towns and cities, including Homieĺ, Chernihiv, Bransk and Staradub.

Moscow attacked once more in 1512. The Muscovite forces seized Smaliensk and advanced deeper into the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania towards Drucak and Vorša. By then Hetman Kanstancin Astrožski had managed to escape from captivity and led his banners against the 80,000 men of the Muscovite horde. The decisive battle of the campaign was fought on 8 September 1514 on the river Krapiŭna near Vorša.



Pahonia coat of arms on cannon barrel of the time



16th-century armed Muscovites. Illuminated engraving. Fragment of plan of Moscow by Georg Braun and Franz Hohenberg. *c* 1575



Grand Hetman
Kanstancin Astrožski.
18th-century copy from a portrait
by an unknown artist
of the first half of the 17th century

The Battle of Vorša

Astrožski placed his most able sharpshooters, armed with hand culverins, in the front lines. The cavalry stood ready on the flanks. Immediately before the battle the Hetman addressed his troops briefly and with passion, 'Noble knights! May your bravery and determination be worthy of your glorious ancestors!..'

The battle did not begin well for the Muscovites, but this did not upset the commanders Cheliadnin and Bulgakov-Golitsa. After all, they had 80,000 men under their command, almost three times as many as the army of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.



Halberd.
Up to 2.5 metres in length,
it was a fearsome weapon
suitable for stabbing and
chopping



Knight's
armour of the period
of the Battle of Vorša.
19th-century replica

The Battle of Vorša was one of the largest fought in Europe in the 16th century. As a result of its resounding victory the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was able to seize the initiative in the war. All the cities conquered by Muscovy were recovered, with the exception of Smaliensk. The alliance forged between Muscovy and certain European states aimed against the Grand Duchy began to crumble.



Battle of Vorša.
Oil on wood.
By an unknown artist
of the early 16th century



Astroh coat of arms,
used by the princely
Astrožski family

Their confidence was misplaced: the two commanders did not work together or even consider it necessary to help each other. An attempt to go around the army of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and attack from the rear failed. After midday the main forces of the Muscovite army were ordered into battle. At this point the carnage was at its greatest. The Hetman was in the midst of his troops, waving his mace above his head, a sight that gave courage to the battle-weary.



Attack sword
of the time

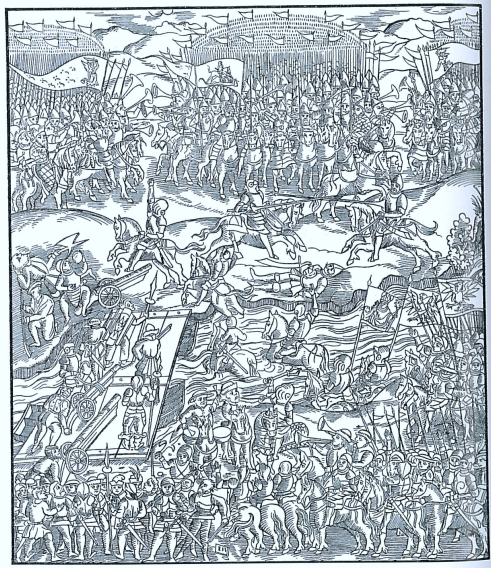


War helmet
with visor.
16th century

Suddenly something quite unexpected happened: Astrožski's cavalry began to withdraw. With cries of victory the stretched lines of Muscovite troops went over to the attack. For a few moments the cavalry did flee and then suddenly turned aside. The Russian noblemen on horseback found themselves facing lines of cannon that had been lying hidden in ambush. The deadly hail of the artillery stopped the attack. The cavalry of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania broke up the tightly packed mass of the invading army and scattered them right across the fields next to the river. They continued to harry the enemy for several miles.



Early 16th-century Muscovite warrior.
Engraving of 1860
based on an older original



Battle of Vorša begins.
Engraving. 1597



16th-century cannon.
It may have seen action
at the Battle of Vorša

The chronicles relate that the Muscovite army lost some 40,000 men. Cheliadnin, Bulgakov-Golitsa, eight other commanders and 5,000 of their men were captured.

Tatar captivity.
Drawing of the time



Military commander Juraj Radzivil, dubbed the 'Lithuanian Hercules' for his many victories. He commanded the cavalry of the Grand Duchy at the Battle of Vorša.
By an unknown artist of the first half of the 17th century.
The portrait comes from the Radzivil collection in Niaśviž

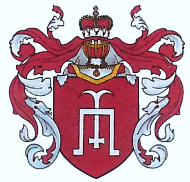


Panoramic view
of Kliecak.
Engraving
by Tamaš Makoŭski.
Early 17th century





Battle with the Tatars.
Woodcut. 1521



Coat of arms
of the Hlinski family

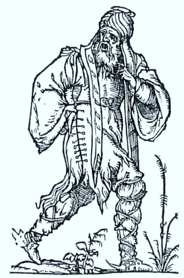
Victories over the Tatars

From the middle of the 15th century onwards Belarus suffered from increasingly frequent attacks by the Crimean Tatars. They burned and plundered towns and villages and drove off thousands of people into captivity. Almost every year the invaders left their trail of blood and smoke in the Belarusian and Ukrainian lands. However, the Tatar raiders very often met with just retribution. The army of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania defeated the Tatars in 1502 on the river Vuša, and again in 1503 near Davyd-Haradok.

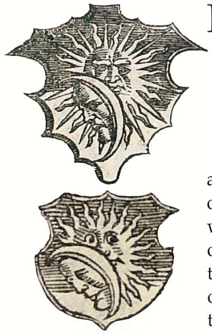
The most important victory was won in 1506 near Kliecak. In the summer of that year Belarus was attacked by a force of 30,000 Tatars. A levy of men from Navahradak, Miensk and Horadnia under Prince Michajla Hlinski moved out against them on 6 August and totally defeated them, liberating 40,000 captives in the process.

Hetman Kanstancin Astrožski delivered another crushing blow to the Tatars at Vil'shanytsia near Kyiv. On the Hetman's grave in the Kyiv Monastery of the Caves there is a headstone bearing an inscription which mentions his 63 victories over 'Muscovites and Tatars'.

Tatar.
Taken from
a mediaeval
engraving



FRANCIŠAK SKARYNA



Printer's mark used by Skaryna symbolised the victory of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, life over death

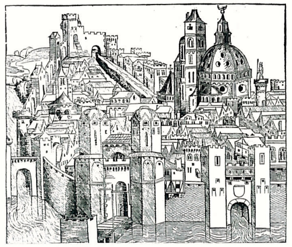
The boy destined to become a giant of the Belarusian and indeed of the whole European Renaissance was born in the ancient city of Polacak. It was there too that he took his first steps into the world of learning. His thirst for knowledge then took him to the Philosophy Faculty of Kraków University, from which he graduated with a bachelor's degree in 1506. He then went on to become Doctor of Liberal Arts. In 1512, after passing his examinations with distinction, he became a Doctor of Medicine of Padua University – one of the foremost institutions of the time in Europe. A picture of this remarkable Belarusian can be seen today in the memorial hall of the University, among the portraits of 40 famous figures of European science and learning who graduated from Padua.

Staves of authority, used by the rectors of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków

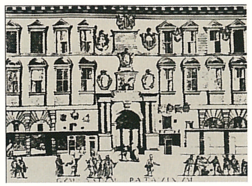




Portrait of Skaryna from the Book of Ecclesiasticus (the Wisdom of Jesus, Son of Sirach). 1517



Padua. 16th-century engraving



Courtyard of Padua University. It was in this university that Skaryna was awarded the degree of Doctor of Medicine. Fragment of an engraving. 1654



Studying at university. Engraving of the time

CHRONOLOGY

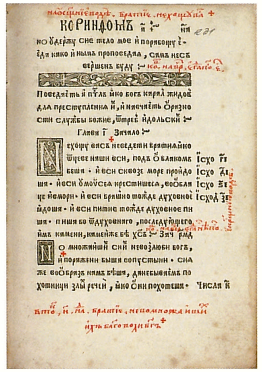
c 1490 – *c* 1551 – life and work of Francišak Skaryna

6 August 1517 – Skaryna publishes the first Belarusian printed book

1522 – Skaryna founds his printing shop in Vilnia



Skaryna's Bible. Title page of the Book of Genesis. Prague. 1519



Page from the second edition of the *Apostle*. Vilnia. 1525

It would have been easy for Skaryna to lead a comfortable and well-rewarded life in the court of some prince or high-ranking nobleman. However, as a true humanist and man of the Renaissance, he chose a different path. He set himself the aim of presenting his nation with the Bible in a language which they could understand, and so became a book printer.

His first book, a Psalter, appeared in Prague on 6 August 1517. In the preface to this book Skaryna wrote, 'I, Francišak, son of Skaryna of Polacak, Doctor of Medicine have ordered this Psalter to be printed ... firstly for the glory and praise of God and of His most pure Mother Mary and then for the benefit of the good people of my country, mainly because it pleased God in His mercy for me to be born into this nation.'

Francišak Skaryna left 23 books of the Bible translated into Belarusian for future generations, and so ensured that the Belarusians joined the family of the foremost European nations.



Fourth Book of Kings, printed by Francišak Skaryna. Prague. 1518

Title folio of the *Akathist to the Tomb of our Lord* from the *Little book for travellers*. 1522





Aaron the first High Priest. Engraving from the Book of Exodus. 1519



Moses receives God's Commandments. Title folio of the Book of Leviticus. 1519



Samson overcomes the lion. Title folio of the Book of Judges. 1519

Skaryna's Bible appeared before Martin Luther's German version; it was the first printed Bible in the East and South Slavonic lands. It was printed almost 50 years before the Polish Bible.

After Prague, Skaryna went to Vil̗nia where he printed two volumes between 1522 and 1525: the *Little book for travellers* and the *Apostle* (Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of St Paul). The printing shop he founded in Vil̗nia was the first in Eastern Europe.

Skaryna has gone down in history as the first printer of Belarus and indeed of the whole East Slavonic world, and as a writer of both prose and poetry intended not just for an élite or for a particular segment of society, but for a whole nation. He achieved renown as a translator not just from the classical languages but from modern ones as well. As a book editor and publisher he succeeded in bringing together words and the printer's art. He was a patriot who expressed his love for his homeland in words that are both heartfelt and, in their simplicity, evidence of his genius, 'Just as animals that stalk the deserts know their holes, birds that fly in the air know their nests, fish that swim in the seas and rivers sense their home currents, and bees defend their hives, so too do people feel great affection for the place where by the grace of God they were born and raised.'



Engraving from the Book of Esther. 1519



Books printed by Skaryna in Prague and Vil̗nia



Ruth gleans the ears of grain left by the harvesters. Engraving from the Book of Ruth. 1519



Papermaking workshop. 17th-century engraving

Skaryna's Psalter was published 47 years before the *Apostle* of Ivan Fedorov (Fiodaraŭ) and Piotr Mścislaviec that marked the beginning of printing in Russia.

Coming from a nation that has always lived in the borderlands of Europe, Skaryna was able to combine in the best possible way the traditions of the Byzantine East and the Latin West. He adorned his books with engravings of great artistic merit, depicting life in Belarus at the time – how people went about their everyday lives, what they wore and what building methods they used. He made a bold departure from established tradition by including his own portrait in the Bible. Readers could even see God depicted without the regulation halo. Skaryna could have been burned at the stake as a heretic no less than 13 times for his transgressions against Church rules on publishing the Bible.



Holy Trinity. Page from the Book of Genesis. 1519

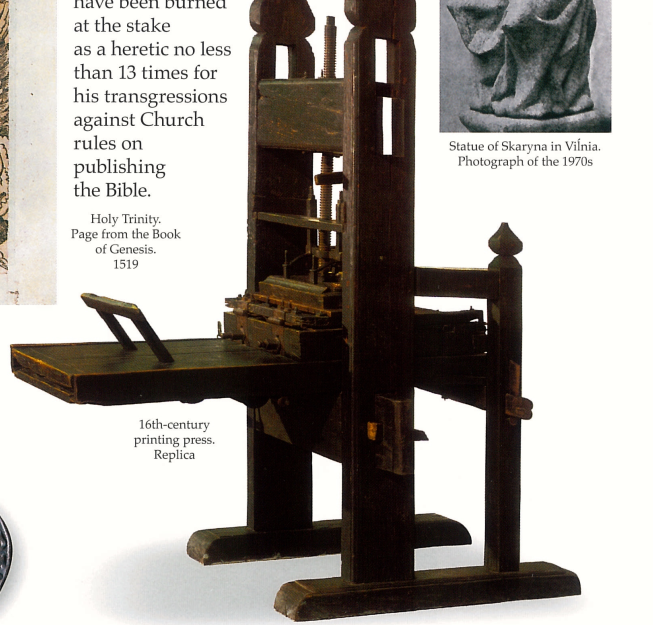


Statue of Skaryna in Vil̗nia. Photograph of the 1970s

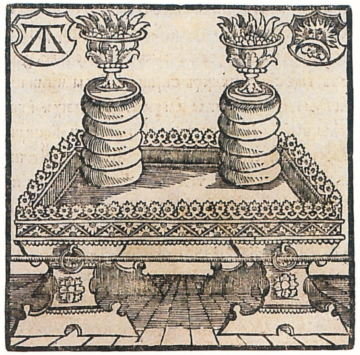
His main 'crime', however, was to have made the divinely inspired, but nevertheless human Book of books accessible to all.



Silver half-*hroš* of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Obverse and reverse. 1511

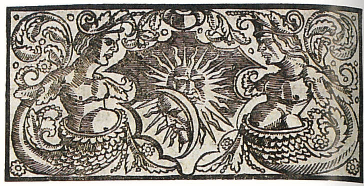


16th-century printing press. Replica



Gilt table with gold wreath.
Folio from the Book of Exodus.
1519

Motif used by Skaryna in some
of the books that he printed in Prague



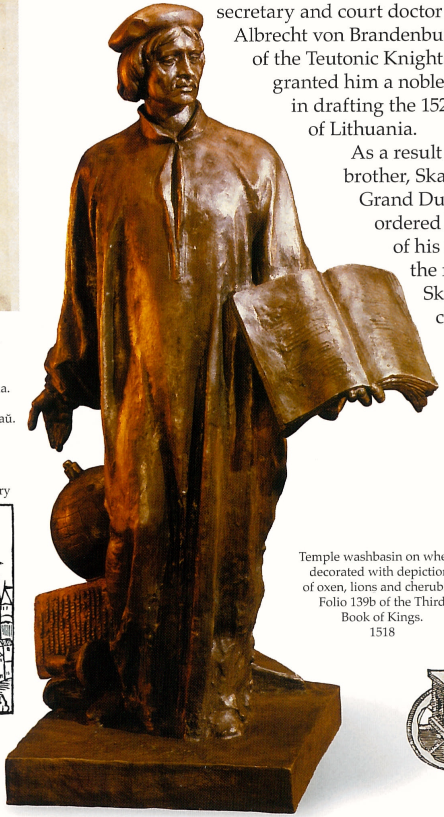
Skaryna spent his life in journeying across Europe, reaching the heights of fame and depths of bitter disillusionment. His life was indeed a reflection of the stormy, eventful age in which he lived.

He met with Martin Luther, and in Vilnia disputed with the renowned doctor and alchemist Paracelsus. He was secretary and court doctor to Jan, Bishop of Vilnia. Albrecht von Brandenburg-Ansbach, the Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights, sought his services and granted him a noble title. Skaryna was involved in drafting the 1529 Statute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

As a result of debts incurred by his brother, Skaryna was thrown in gaol. Grand Duke Žyhimont the Old himself ordered him to be freed. In recognition of his services to his homeland, the monarch granted Skaryna a special personal charter, which stated, 'Let no one dare detain or arrest him or seize his property under pain of severe punishment... No one shall interfere in his affairs, or use force of any kind against him, or compel him to carry out duties or services to the city on a par with other inhabitants, in whatsoever place he may choose to dwell.'



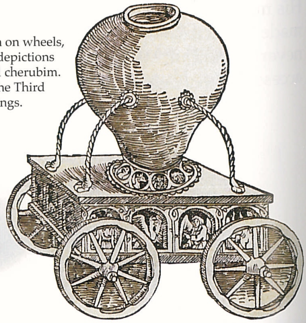
Cherubim in the Temple.
Engraving from the Third Book of Kings.
1518



Francišak Skaryna.
Sculpture
by Aliaksiej Hliebaŭ.
1954

Vilnia.
Engraving of the first half of the 16th century





Temple washbasin on wheels,
decorated with depictions
of oxen, lions and cherubim.
Folio 139b of the Third
Book of Kings.
1518



Title folio
of the Song
of Songs.
1518



Prague.
Old engraving



Title folio
of the Psalter.
King David
addresses
a psalm
to the Lord
of Hosts.
1517

The place he chose, soon after being freed from prison, was Prague, the city in which he was to die. His memory lives on in the grateful minds of the Belarusian people.



Letter from King Ferdinand of Bohemia to Skaryna's son,
informing him of his father's death

In striving to extend the light of learning to all the Eastern Slavs, Skaryna took a number of his books to Moscow. He proposed to a number of lay and spiritual leaders that a start should be made on printing books. Instead of receiving thanks, he witnessed how, at the order of the Grand Duke of Moscow, a huge bonfire was made of the books he had brought.



Francišak Skaryna of Polacak.
Fresco from the Hall
of the Forty in the Palazzo
del Bo of Padua University.
The hall contains portraits
of the most illustrious scholars
to have graduated
from the university.
By Giacomo Forno. 1942

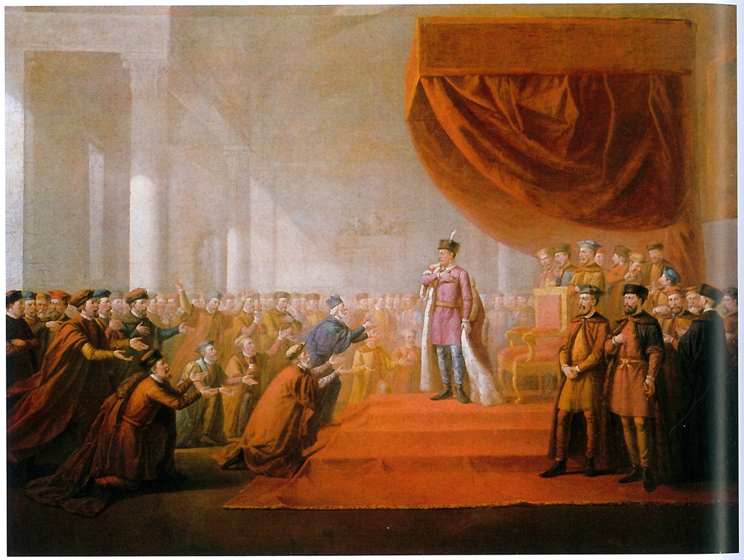
THE RENAISSANCE IN BELARUS



Communion chalice.
Late 15th – early 16th centuries.
Silver-gilt, engraved,
embossed, enamelled

The 16th and beginning of the 17th centuries are considered to be the period when Belarusian culture truly flourished. This upsurge was possible only thanks to the cultural achievements of the preceding centuries, the rich traditions of folk arts and crafts and also the beneficial influence of the European Renaissance and its humanistic ideas.

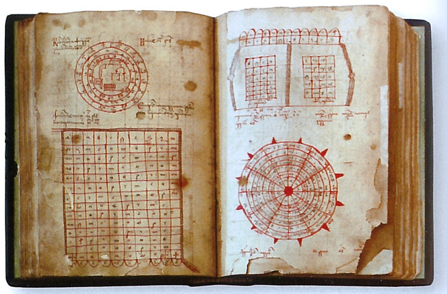
The Vilnia Academy opened in 1579. This was the first higher educational establishment in the Grand Duchy. Apart from Vilnia, young Belarusians also studied in the universities of Poland, Bohemia, Italy, Germany, France and Switzerland. The registration records of Charles University in Prague contain the names of 33 students from the Grand Duchy who studied there in the 15th and the first half of the 16th centuries. Jan and Paviel from Horadnia, Stanislaŭ from Kliecak, Vinceś from Slucak, Mikola from Ašmiany and Marka from Niamiha were all students of Kraków University at the same time as Francišak Skaryna.



Ściapan Batura (Stephen Báthory) founding the Vilnia Academy.
Painting by Vincent Smakoŭski. Mid-19th century



Coat
of arms
of Slonim



16th-century Belarusian
manuscript calendar

CHRONOLOGY

- *c* 1470 – after 1533 – life and work of Mikola Husoŭski
- 1480–1520 – life and work of Jan Višlicki
- 1516 – Jan Višlicki's poem *Bellum prutenum* (The Prussian war) published
- 1523 – Mikola Husoŭski's poem *Carmen de statura, feritate ac venatione bisontis* (Song on the appearance, ferocity and hunting of the bison) published
- 1579 – Vilnia Academy opened
- 1595–1640 – life and work of Maciej Kazimir Sarbieŭski
- 1619 – publication of Mialiet Smatrycki's *Grammar*



Miniature from
the *Dziesiacihlaŭ*
(manuscript books
of the Old and
New Testaments)
by copyist
Maciej Dziasiaty
of Polacak.
16th century



Renowned poet
and philosopher
Maciej Kazimir
Sarbieŭski,
the 'Christian Horace',
whose works were
illustrated by Rubens



Cologne edition of Sarbieŭski's
Latin poetry. 1682

The Society of Jesus – the official name of the Jesuit Order – was the most active organisation involved in the spreading of education. Belarus was covered by a network of Jesuit schools and colleges. The standard of education provided by the colleges was scarcely distinguishable from that offered by the universities of the time. For example the teacher of poetics and rhetoric in the Polacak College was the neo-Latin poet and philosopher Maciej Kazimir Sarbieŭski (Matthias Casimirus Sarbievius). His first book, *Lyricorum libri tres* (Three books of lyrics), went through six editions in various cities of Europe in the author's lifetime. One of these editions was illustrated by Rubens.

At that time Belarus had an educational system which comprised schools run by Orthodox fraternities, Protestant congregations and the Catholic Church.



Adoration of the Magi. 1514.
From the collection of the Museum
of Old Belarusian Culture
at the Belarus Academy of Sciences



Grand Duke Kazimir Jahajlavič
and his wife with monks
of the Bernardine Order.
Painting by an unknown artist
of the 17th century



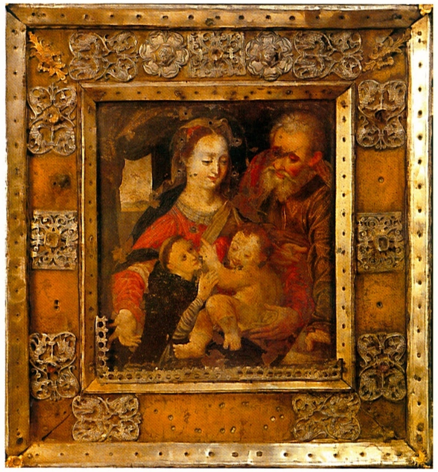
Pageboy. In those times the children
of noble families were often sent off
to serve at the Grand Duke's court.
Modern replica

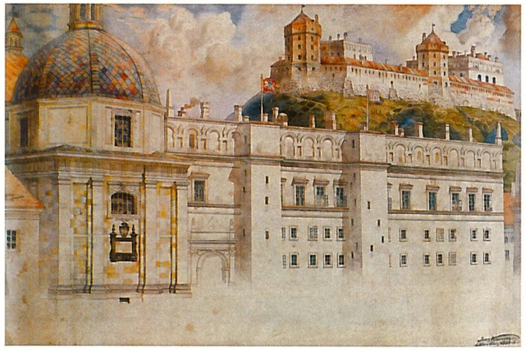


Map of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, by Nicolas Sanson d'Abbeville, printed in Amsterdam in the second half of the 17th century. In the middle of the 16th century the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was made up of the Palatinates of Vilnia, Troki, Navahradak, Bierašcie, Amścislaŭ, Padliašša, Polacak, Viciebsk, Kyiv, Miensk and Bratslav, and the Duchy of Samogitia

Medal with portrait of Grand Duke Žyhimont the Old. Copper-gilt. Obverse. 1527

Holy Family with St Francis. 16th century. Icon from the Franciscan Cathedral of the Dormition of the Virgin in Pinsk. The frame, made in the late 16th – first half of 17th centuries, is also of great artistic value





Grand Ducal castle in Vilnia. Artist's impression of the 19th century based on mediaeval drawings



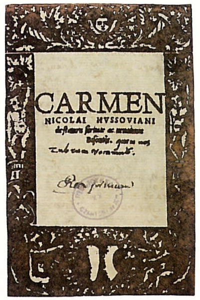
Fragments of a knight's belt from the late 16th or early 17th centuries. Silver-gilt, embossed, engraved



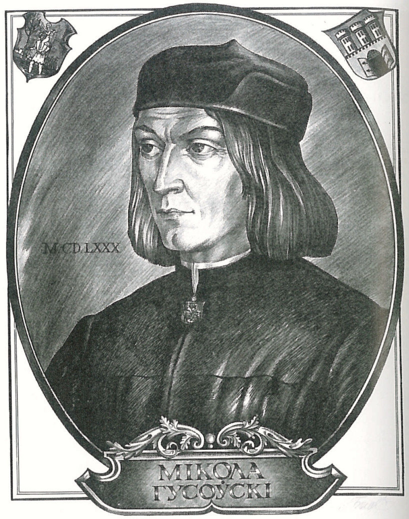


Bison. Engraving from *Rerum Moscoviticarum Commentarii* by Sigismund von Herberstein. 1549

Belarusian poetry of the time was on a par with that of the rest of Europe. It was written mainly in Latin, the international language of learning, literature and diplomacy. Husoŭski's poem *Carmen de statura … bisontis* was published in 1523 in Kraków. It resounded throughout Europe like a paean of praise to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the country's nature, history and people. Another Belarusian writer, Jan Višlicki, published a poem entitled *Bellum prutenum* (The Prussian war) which deals with the brilliant victory over the crusaders at Grunwald. Other works by Belarusian authors that were read in the countries of Europe included the epic *Deketeros akroama* (The Ten-year tale of the martial deeds of Kryštop Mikalaj Radzivil 'the Thunderbolt') by Andrej Rymša, the *Radivilias* (Radziviliad) of Jan Radvan (Joannes Radvanus), and the *Poselstwo do Wielkiego księcia Moskiewskiego* (an account in verse of an Embassy to the Grand Duke of Muscovy) by Haĺliaš Pieĺhrymoŭski (Pielgrzymowski, Piligrimovius).



Cover of the first edition of Husoŭski's poem. Kraków. 1523



The renowned Belarusian Renaissance poet Mikola Husoŭski, the creator of the famous poem *Carmen de statura, feritate ac venatione bisontis*. Drawing by Uladzimir Basalyha

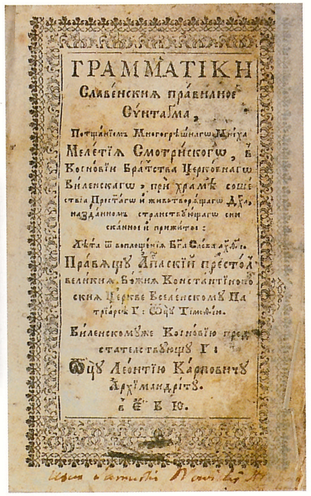
Jan Višlicki, author of *Bellum prutenum*. Drawing by Jaŭhien Kulik



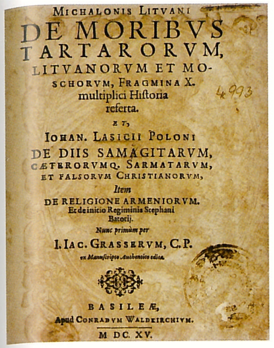
16th-century tile with portrait in relief from the Lower Castle in Viĺnia



The rise of an educated society was directly linked to the development of book printing. From the 1550s to the 1570s the printing house in Bieraście, under the patronage of Mikalaj Radzivil 'the Black', produced more than 40 titles. Skaryna's worthy successor Symon Budny printed books in Niaśviž. There were printing houses in Zabludaŭ (near Bielastok), Ciapina, Liubča, Kuciejna (near Vorša), Mahilioŭ, Bialyničy, Losk, Bujničy and other towns. In 1619 the printing workshop in Ješuje (now Vievis in *Lietuva*) published Mialiet Smatrycki's *Grammar*. For two centuries it served as a text book of the Church Slavonic language throughout the East Slavonic world.



Mialiet Smatrycki's *Grammar* was for two centuries the standard textbook of the Church Slavonic language. 1619



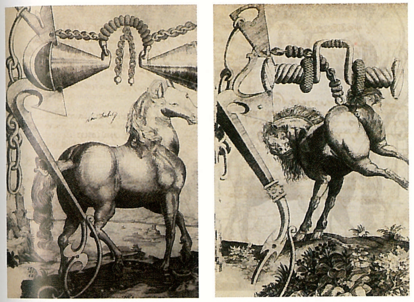
MICHALONIS LITVANI
DE MORIBVS TARTARORVM, LITVANORVM ET MOSCHORVM, FRAGMINA X.
multiplici Historia referta.
ET,
IOHAN. LASICII POLONI
DE DIIS SAMAGITARVM, CÆTERORVMQ. SARMATARVM, ET FALSORVM CHRISTIANORVM,
Item
DE RELIGIONE ARMENIORVM.
Et de initio Regiminis Stephani Batorij.
Nunc primùm per
I. IAC. GRASSERVM, C.P.
ex Manuscripto Authentico edita.
BASILEÆ,
Apud CONRADVM WALDKIRCHIVM.
M DC. XV.

Book by the 16th-century Belarusian humanist Michalon Litvin, *De moribus tartarorum, lituanorum et moschorum* (On the Customs of the Tatars, Lithuanians and Muscovites). Basel. 1615



19th-century London. This engraving shows the place where Jan Litvin (John Lettou) lived. He opened the first printing shop in the city in 1480

The printing house of the Mamonič brothers in Viĺnia played an important role in the life of the state. It was there that the 1588 Statute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was printed.



Engravings made by Tamaš Makoŭski for *Hippica* by Mikalaj Kryštop Darahastajski (Mikołaj Krzysztof Dorohostajski). Kraków. 1603



16th-century printed books

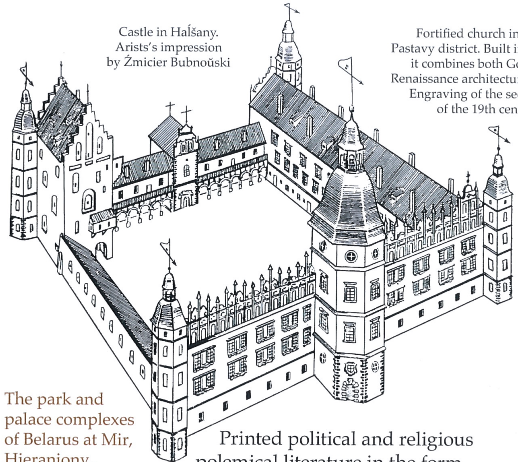
Radzivil Castle in Niaśviž today





Book printing in Muscovy was begun by the Belarusians Ivan Fiodaraŭ and Piotr Mścislaviec. Hand-painted leaf from the *Tetraevangelia* of Piotr Mścislaviec, printed in Viĺnia. 1575

Castle in Halšany.
Arists's impression
by Źmicier Bubnoŭski



Fortified church in Kamai,
Pastavy district. Built in 1603–1606,
it combines both Gothic and
Renaissance architectural elements.
Engraving of the second half
of the 19th century



Mir Castle, built in the Gothic style in the 16th century.
The castle has been listed by UNESCO
as a World Heritage Site



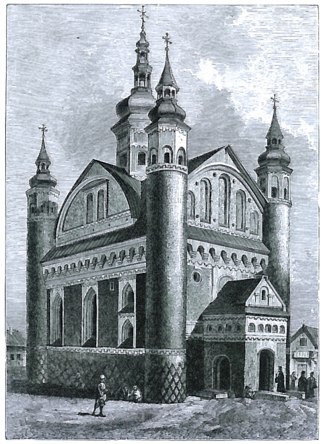
The park and palace complexes of Belarus at Mir, Hieraniony, Smaliany and Niaśviž are especially noteworthy for their combination of west European architectural influences with local building traditions.

Printed political and religious polemical literature in the form of tracts, prefaces and postfaces was widely disseminated throughout the Grand Duchy. In contrast to poetry, such works were written mainly in Belarusian. Among the masters of the genre were Francišak Skaryna, Symon Budny, Vasiĺ Ciapinski, Andrej Valian, Lieŭ Sapieha, Mialiet Smatrycki, Apanas Filipovič and Ipat Paciej.



St Demetrios.
16th-century fresco
of the Church
of the Annunciation
in Supraśl

Fortified church in Supraśl (now in Poland),
built in 1503–1511.
It combines both Gothic and Renaissance elements.
Engraving of the second half of the 19th century



Catholic church
in Usieliub,
Navahradak
district.
Founded
in the first half
of the 14th
century
by Jan Niamira,
equerry
to Grand Duke
Vitaŭt.
Photograph
by Taciana
Caruk





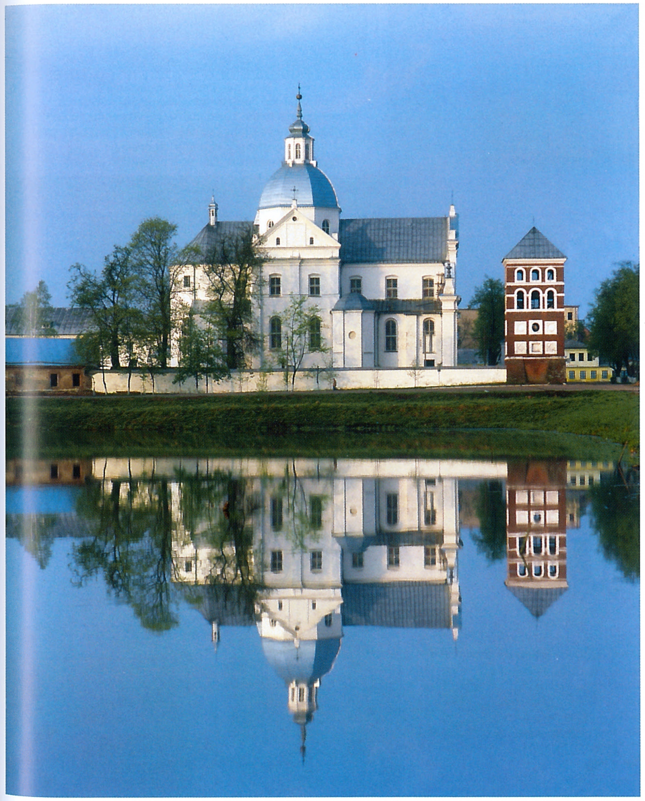
Fortified church
in Muravanka,
Ščučyn district.
Example of Belarusian
defensive architecture.
Early 16th century

Belarusian translations of literature that circulated elsewhere in Europe enjoyed great popularity in educated circles. Among such works were the *Alexander romance*, the *Tale of Troy* and the *Tale of Tristan and Iseult*. The tradition of chronicle writing was maintained. As outstanding examples of this genre we may mention the chronicles of Barkulabaŭ and Mahilioŭ, and the *Chronika Bychaŭca*.



Medal struck
to commemorate the wedding
of Prince Bahuslaŭ Radzivil.
Silver. Obverse. 1665

Church of Corpus Christi in Niaśviž, built in 1584–1593 by the architect Giovanni (Jan) Maria Bernardoni –
the earliest example of the Baroque style in Belarus. Photograph by Anatol Kliaščuk. 2001



Grammar, published
by the printing shop
of the Mamonič brothers
in Vilnia in 1621





Gospel according to St Mark.
16th-century
Belarusian manuscript



Mother of God Hodegetria the Unfading Flower. First half of the 17th century. Belarusian school of iconography



Bona Sforza, Grand Duchess of Lithuania and Queen of Poland, wife of Žyhimont the Old. Workshop of Lucas Cranach the Younger

Engravings and portraiture were coming to occupy an increasingly significant place in figurative art. Picture galleries started to make an appearance in the palaces of the grand nobility, lined with portraits of their renowned forebears. The richest collection of the kind was to be found in the Niaśviž residence of the Radzivil princes.

Typical for the Baroque art of the period in Belarus were portraits in the 'Sarmatian' style where the subject is portrayed striking the heroic pose of a warrior. Portrait of Kryštop Viesialoŭski. By an unkown artist. First half of the 17th century





Educated circles in the Grand Duchy were familiar with the book by Baldassare Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano* (The Book of the courtier), in a free translation into Polish by Lukaš Hurnicki (Łukasz Górnicki), Vilnia Librarian to Grand Duke Žyhimont Aŭhust. 1566



Joshua leads the Israelites across the Jordan River. Woodcut from the title page of the Book of Joshua, translated and published by Francišak Skaryna. Prague. 1518

Unfortunately, Belarus' eastern neighbour, Russia, remained untouched by the European Renaissance.



16th-century portrait of a lady. By an unknown artist

The masterworks of art, literature and philosophy that were created at the time by the most outstanding representatives of the Belarusian nation were worthy additions to the treasures of the general European Renaissance.



Portrait of Hryzelda Sapieha. By an unknown artist. 1630s



Portrait of Aliaksandr Astrožski by an unknown artist. Mid-17th century. From the Radzivil collection in Niaśviž



Kmiet (free peasant or yeoman) and lord on a 16th-century woodcut



Trajak, coin worth three *hrošy*. Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Silver. Obverse and reverse. 1563

THE LIVONIAN WAR



Muscovite horseman. Engraving from Sigismund von Herberstein's *Rerum Moscoviticarum Commentarii*. 1549

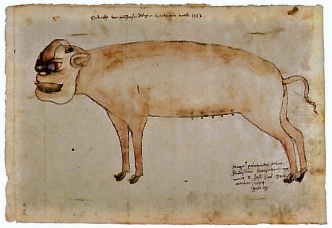
The Livonian War was largely fought out on Belarusian soil. The Muscovite military commanders brought death, humiliation and destruction. The Muscovite chronicler had this to say about the Viciebsk campaign, 'The *astroh* (outer fortifications) was captured and burnt down, the *pasad* (merchants' areas by the city walls) were all destroyed by fire. Many of the people inside the *astroh* were killed, the villages and hamlets near Viciebsk were all overrun and burnt to the ground.'

Maciej Stryjkoŭski, historian and poet, participant in the Livonian War and author of *Kronika Polska, Litewska, Żmódzka y wszystkiej Rusi*



In an effort to gain an outlet to the Baltic Sea Muscovy attacked Livonia in 1558. Livonia was a confederation of five principalities founded by the German knights in the Baltic region. The troops of Grand Duke Ivan IV the Terrible seized Narva and Dorpat (Tartu). The Master of the Livonian Order sought the help of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania by declaring Livonia a vassal state of the Grand Duchy. The regiments of Hetman Mikalaj Radzivil 'the Red' moved out to assist the Livonians. Grand Duke Žyhimont Auhust proposed to the enemy that both sides should withdraw their forces, but Muscovy had other plans. 'We will unite our forces so that Poland and Lithuania will be unable to slip away from us,' wrote Ivan IV to the German Emperor.

At the onset of winter in 1563 the main Muscovite forces, headed by Grand Duke Ivan the Terrible himself, laid siege to Polacak. The small garrison at the disposal of Palatine Stanislaŭ Davojna was faced with a choice: they could either lay down their arms or defend the city to the last man. The warriors of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania chose the second course of action. They held out for 16 days. Davojna regrouped the defenders inside the castle and set fire to the *astroh* (outer fortifications) and *pasad* (outer ward). This was a mistake; under cover of the thick smoke the Muscovite *strel'tsy* (riflemen) broke into the city and dragged their cannon up close to the castle walls. The Muscovites had to attack seven times before Davojna was compelled to seek mercy.



Deformed boar, born in Vilnia in 1562. This drawing of the time was understood as an allegory of the war



Henri de Valois was the Grand Duke of Lithuania for a few months in 1574. The Belarusians called him Hienryk Valiežyč; for the Poles he was Henryk Walezy. From François Quesnel's workshop. Second half of the 16th century



Noblemen on horseback, from the retinue of the Grand Duke. From a 19th-century engraving

CHRONOLOGY

- 1558–1583 – Livonian War
  - 1563 – army of Ivan IV the Terrible capture Polacak
  - 1564 – defeat of the Muscovites on the river Vula
- 1576–1586 – reign of Grand Duke and King Ściapan Batura
  - 1579 – liberation of Polacak

Duke of Muscovy, Ivan IV the Terrible. Engraving by Hans Weigel. 1590





Ivan IV depicted as Oriental despot. Caricature from Western Europe. 1581

On 15 February Polacak was captured by the enemy.

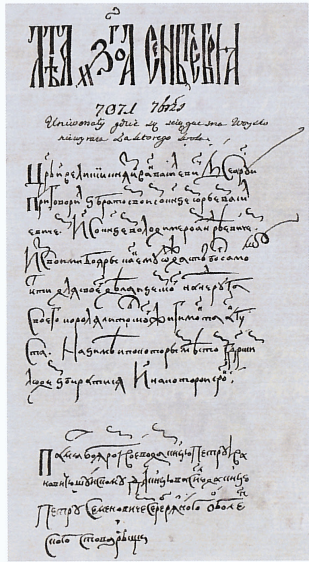
In spite of all his promises, Ivan the Terrible declared not just the soldiers, but all the citizens of Polacak to be prisoners of war.



The famine of 1571 in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania spread in the aftermath of the war with Muscovy. From a broadsheet printed in Augsburg

The Italian Alessandro Guagnini, who had fought in the war as military commander of Viciebsk states in his book *Sarmatiae Europeae descriptio* that Grand Duke Ivan drove 50,000 prisoners out of Polacak, many of whom died of cold and hunger on the wintry roads. Russian *strel'tsy* and Tatar units murdered all the Catholics in the city, and a terrible fate awaited the Jews, infants and the old alike: they were drowned beneath the ice of the Dźvina River and Lake Valovaje (Bull's Lake).

Page from the Moscow state appointments record books with the entry for Ivan IV's Polacak campaign





Muscovites killing civilians. German engraving from a broadsheet reporting the events of the Livonian war. 1561



Military execution. 16th-century woodcut



Ladździa coat of arms used by some 40 noble clans of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland (the Ardyniec, Asipoŭski, Babicki, Brodski, Bilievič, Ivanoŭski, Kabylinski, Labecki, Ražkoŭski and other families)



SARMATIAE EVROPEÆ DESCRIPTIO, QVAE REGNVM POLONIAE, LITVANIAM, SAMOGITIAM, RVSSIAM, MASSOVIAM, PRVSSIAM, POMERANIAM, LIVONIAM, ET MOSCHOVIAE, TARTARIAEQVE partem complectitur.

ALEXANDRI GVAGNINI Veronensis, Equitis Aurati, peditumque præfecti.

Cui supplementi loco, ea quae gesta sunt superiori anno, inter Serenissimum Regem Poloniæ, & Magnum Ducem Moschoviæ breviter adiecta sunt. Item Genealogia Regum Polonorum.

SPIRÆ.

CVM PRIVILEGIO IMPER. ET REGIS GALL.

APVD BERNARDVM ALBINVM

M. D. LXXXI.

Title page of Alessandro Guagnini's *Sarmatiae Europeae descriptio*, which contains an account of the Livonian War



Page from *Sarmatiae Europeae descriptio*, published in 1581



Mikalaj Radzivil 'the Red', Hetman of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Portrait by an unknown artist of the 17th century



Italian Alessandro Guagnini, author of *Sarmatiae Europeae descriptio*. During the Livonian War he served in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as military commander of Viciebsk

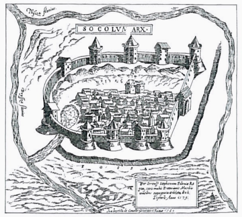
The loss of Polacak was a serious blow to the government in Vilnia. The Grand Duke of Lithuania despatched envoys to Moscow to sue for peace, but to no avail. Ivan IV had no intention of returning the Polacak lands, and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania could not accept their loss. The war broke out again with renewed force in January 1564. On this occasion the Muscovite armies were aiming for Miensk and Navahradak. However, the invasion was halted.

Near the village of Ivansk on the river Vula forces under Hetman Mikalaj Radzivil 'the Red' sprang a surprise attack on an advancing army twice as big: the 24,000 men under their commander Petr Shuiskii. The Muscovite forces lost 9,000 men killed by bullets, sabres and axes, and about the same number drowned in the river.

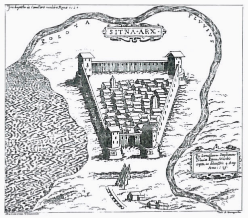
Hajduk infantry from Hungary served in the army of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania during the Livonian War. From an 18th-century engraving



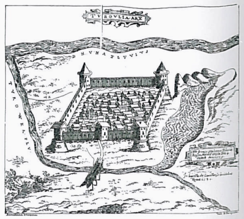
Sokal

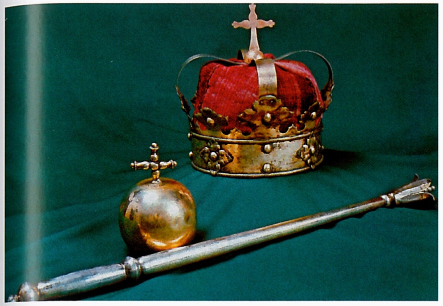


Sitna

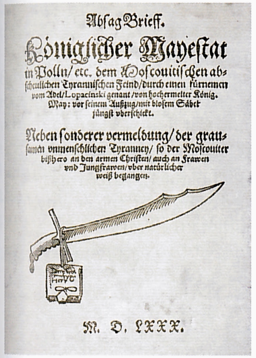


Turoŭlia





Ściapan Batura's regalia



Absag Brieff.

Königlicher Mayestat in Polln/ etc. dem Moscouitischen abscheulichen Tyrannischen Feind/ durch einen fürnemen vom Adel/ Lopacinski genant/ von hochermelter König. May: vor seinem Außzug/ mit blosem Säbel jüngst vberschickt.

Neben sonderer vermeldung/ der grausamen vnmenschlichen Tyranney/ so der Moscouiter bißhero an den armen Christen/ auch an Frawen vnd Jungfrawen/ vber natürlicher weiß begangen.

M. D. LXXX.

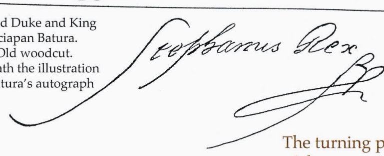
West European broadsheet containing depiction of Ściapan Batura's letter to Ivan IV the Terrible

After this stunning victory a siege war began, with some local clashes. This was the serious situation that compelled the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to enter into a union with Poland.



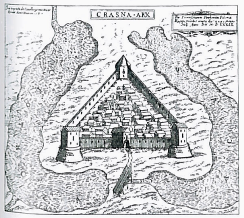
Sic STEPHANVS frontem vivens oculosque gerebat REX, pius, et sapiens belloq. et pace coruscans.

Grand Duke and King Ściapan Batura. Old woodcut. Beneath the illustration is Batura's autograph

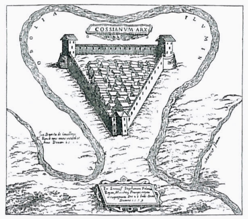


The turning point of the war with Muscovy was when the Hungarian Báthory István (Ściapan Batura) became Grand Duke of Lithuania and King of Poland.

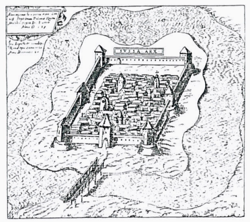
Krasny



Kaźjan



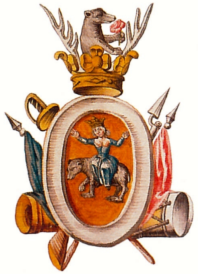
Suša



Castles built by Muscovites on the occupied Belarusian territory. Engravings of 1579

Ściapan Batura's army lays siege to Polacak in 1579. 16th-century engraving





Ravič coat of arms, first seen at the beginning of the 14th century. It was borne by more than 250 noble clans of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland; among them were the Čerski, Niamcevič, Prušynski, Romier, Salamiarecki, Suchi and Viarcinski families. Many of them fought in the Livonian War

At his coronation the new Grand Duke and King Ściapan Batura (Stephen Báthory, Stefan Batory, Báthory István) – an oustanding military commander and skilled diplomat – swore that he would always ride at the head of his army and would return the lands occupied by the Muscovites.

In 1579 Batura led an army of 40,000 men to regain Polacak. After an exceptionally difficult siege lasting three weeks in August the city was finally liberated. After this Batura's forces captured all the supposedly impregnable fortresses built by the enemy. Polacak and its surroundings were so empty of people as a result of the war that peasants from near Mahilioŭ had to be brought in to rebuild the city's defences.

Morion helmet of the time





Grand Duke and King Ściapan Batura liberates Polacak. 16th-century woodcut



Commemorative medal depicting Ściapan Batura, struck in honour of the return of Polacak and Livonia to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Silver. Obverse. 1582

Batura's advance was eventually halted at Pskov. The King failed to take the city and so entered into talks with Muscovy. A peace treaty was signed in 1582, according to which hardly any changes were made to the frontier between the Grand Duchies of Lithuania and Muscovy.

The Livonian War had grave consequences for the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Firstly, it led to the forced union with the Kingdom of Poland, which brought with it the danger that the country would lose its sovereignty. Secondly, the war heralded a long period of strife in which the country was ravaged by the continuing power struggle with Muscovy; the Belarusians were almost wiped out as a nation, and the political and economic stability of the state was severely undermined.



Detail of *Bathory before the walls of Pskov*. By Jan Matejko. 1872

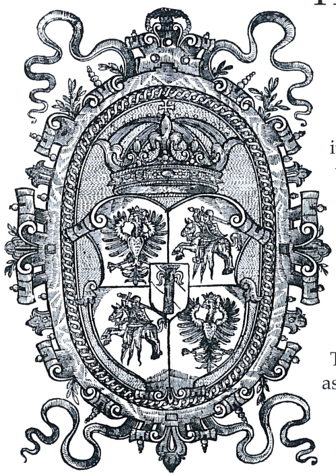


Victory over the Muscovites. 17th-century copper engraving

Military musicians. 16th-century drawing



THE UNION OF LUBLIN



Coat of arms
of the Commonwealth.
1623

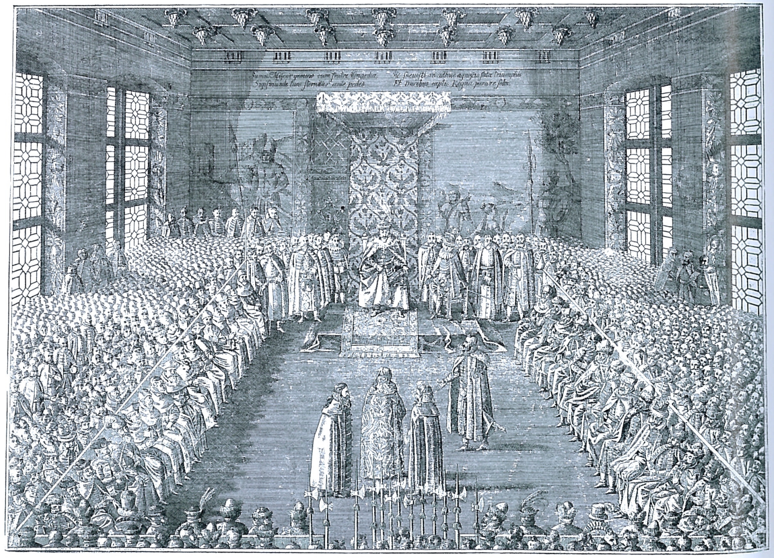
The difficult situation in which the Grand Duchy of Lithuania found itself during the Livonian War led the state into an ever closer alliance with the neighbouring Kingdom of Poland. It would otherwise have been impossible to defeat the invaders from the East and to liberate the lands of Polacak that had been occupied by the Muscovite forces.

Discussion of the terms on which the two states would be unified was opened at the Warsaw Diet of 1563; the sessions were attended by a delegation from the Grand Duchy. The Polish side referred to acts dating back to the times of Jahajla and demanded the complete incorporation of Litva into the Kingdom of Poland. The emissaries of the Grand Duchy viewed these documents as falsifications and insisted on an alliance of two equal states.

The arguments went on for several years, and in the meantime the Grand Duchy of Lithuania required more and more support from Poland to continue the war. The nobility, who suffered the most at the hands of the invaders, were already prepared to accept the conditions imposed by Poland. They were also attracted by the liberties enjoyed by the nobility in the Polish Kingdom.

The Belarusian magnates – *eg* the Radzivil, Valovič and Chadkievič families – stood firm in their support of the Grand Duchy's independence.

The Grand Duchy's hopes that Poland would give aid in the war with Muscovy after the conclusion of the Union of Lublin proved fruitless.



Diet session in Warsaw.
Engraving by Tamaš Makoŭski. 1610s

CHRONOLOGY

1 July 1569 – Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Kingdom of Poland unite to form the Commonwealth



Grand Duke and King Žyhimont Aŭhust.
The Union of Lublin was concluded in his reign.
Painting by Marcello Bacciarelli.
Late 18th or early 19th centuries

Vilnia grandee
Stanislaŭ Sabina.
Engraving on copper.
1590



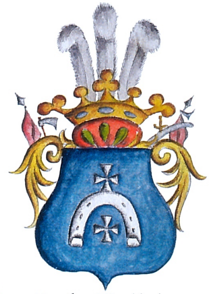
In January 1569 a joint parliamentary assembly of both the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish Crown was called in Lublin to discuss the question of union. It at once became apparent that there was a difference of principle between the delegations. The senators and emissaries of the Grand Duchy conducted their sessions separately from the Poles. They, in their turn, demanded that the King and Grand Duke, Žyhimont Aŭhust, use his authority to compel the representatives of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to accept the unfavourable conditions on offer.

The delegation of the Grand Duchy left Lublin in protest. The Poles seized the moment to obtain from the ruling monarch a number of decrees which annexed to the Polish Crown huge tracts of the wealthiest territories of the Grand Duchy – Padliašša (Podlasie), Volhynia, Podil'lya and the Kyiv Palatinate.

In Vilnia the possibility of war with Poland was already being considered, but war on two fronts would inevitably have brought ruin on the country. There was nothing to be done but send a delegation once again to the Lublin Diet. The magnates of the Grand Duchy did everything in their power to maintain the autonomy of the state. A compromise was finally reached and on 1 July 1569 the Act of Union was signed.



Seal
of Žyhimont
Aŭhust.
Drawing
of the 19th century



More than 500 noble clans of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Poland used the *Lubič* coat of arms; among them were the Dabužynski, Hryharovič, Lapacinski, Milaš, Mickievič, Navicki, Niezabytoŭski and Radzišeŭski families



In 1569 the small town of Radaškavičy was granted a coat of arms and the right to self-government in accordance with the Magdeburg Law

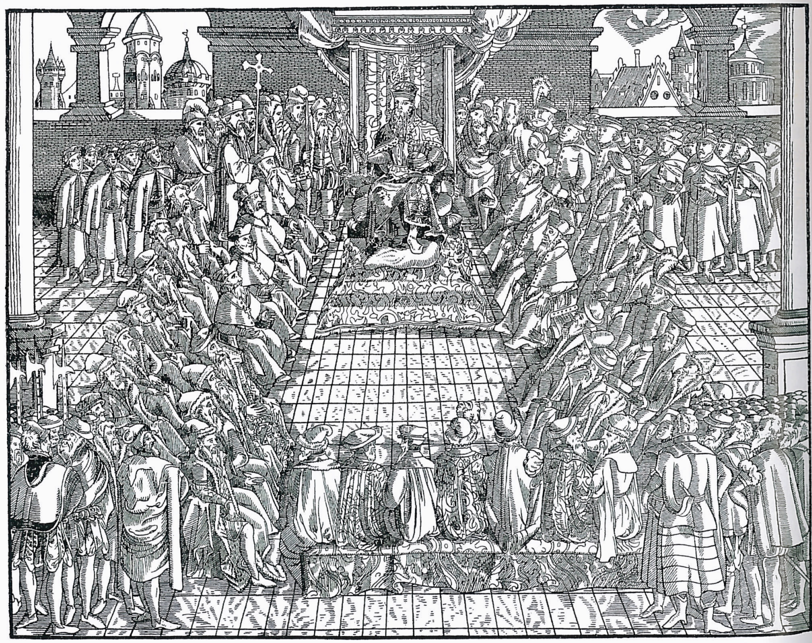
The Grand Duchy of Lithuania did not cease to exist as a result of the Union of Lublin. Both states – the Grand Duchy and Poland – preserved a considerable degree of autonomy, but the Union did create a new country on the political map – the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which was essentially a confederation of two neighbouring states.



Union of Lublin. Fragment of painting by Jan Matejko. 1869

According to the Union of Lublin, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland were united in a single 'Commonwealth' with one parliament and one monarch – the King of Poland was simultaneously the Grand Duke of Lithuania. The nobility enjoyed the same rights throughout the whole territory of the state. Poles gained the right to acquire lands and to hold state office in the Grand Duchy. The Act of Union provided for a single foreign policy and a single monetary system.

The laws of the Grand Duchy were to be brought into line with existing Polish legislation.



Diet. Engraving from Alessandro Guagnini's *Sarmatiae Europeae descriptio.* 1581



Ceremony of enthronement of the King and Grand Duke. 16th-century miniature

In reality, however, things turned out differently. The two legal systems did not converge. On the contrary, the new codification of the laws of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania – the Statute of 1588 – stressed the state's autonomy and defended it with greater vigour. The Grand Duchy continued to maintain its own financial policies and to issue its own currency. It preserved its own name within the frontiers of the Commonwealth, it kept the title of its monarch and its own system of government. Only those born within the Grand Duchy had the right to acquire land and occupy offices of state.

The Commonwealth of the Two Nations (the Belarusian *Reč Paspalitaja* and the Polish *Rzeczpospolita* both correspond to the Latin *res publica*) was at the time one of the greatest and most powerful states in Europe. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania continued to be part of the Commonwealth until the end of the 18th century.



Field Hetman Raman Sanhuška, one of the opponents of the Union of Lublin. 18th-century engraving

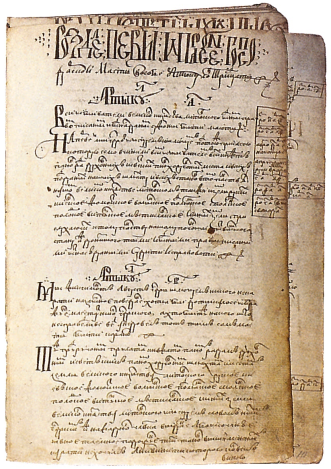


Magnates. Engraving made from a 16th-century drawing



Ducat struck in the reign of Žyhimont Aŭhust. Obverse and reverse. 1571

THE STATUTES OF THE GRAND DUCHY OF LITHUANIA



Statute of 1566

The first legal code in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was ratified by Grand Duke Kazimir Jahajlavič in 1468. It consisted of 25 articles that reflected the kind of law then prevalent in Belarus. Kazimir's Code protected private property, confirmed that serfs were bound to the land and dependent on the landowner, contained provisions for court judgements to be compulsorily put into effect and introduced the principle of individual responsibility.

The need to bolster the sovereignty of the state required further extension and elaboration of the legal system. This work took several years and eventually led to the compilation of the Statutes of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

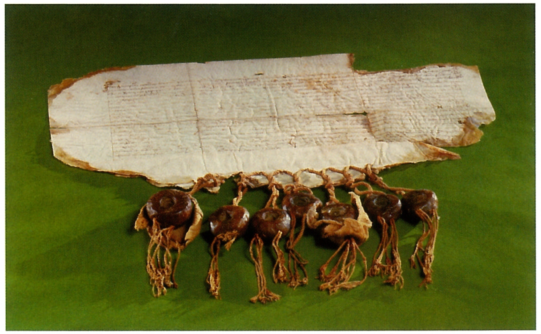
The third of these statutes was the most complete and refined. The best legal experts in the Grand Duchy were guided in this endeavour by two outstanding statesmen, the Chancellor Astafiej Valovič and the Deputy Chancellor (from 1589 the Chancellor) Lieŭ Sapieha.



Grand Duke Kazimir Jahajlavič. During his reign the first code of laws of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was compiled. Painting by Marcello Bacciarelli. Late 18th or early 19th centuries



Seal of Ryhor Valovič, castellan of Navahradak and *starasta* (elder) of Slonim. 1571. Rubbing



Grand Ducal deed of gift of villages around Chvojniki. Parchment, ink, wax. 1568



Chancellor Astafiej Valovič, who, together with Deputy Chancellor Lieŭ Sapieha, oversaw the compilation of the 1588 Statute

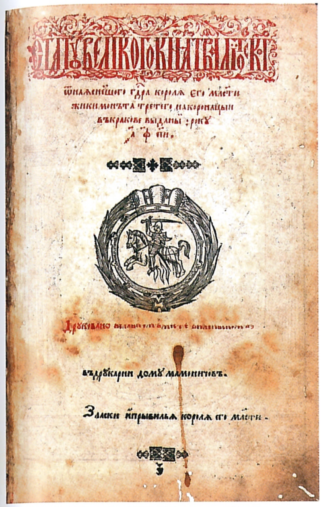
The Statute of 1588 was the first European law code to show concern for nature conservation; its provisions offered protection to valuable animals and birds.



Crown of Grand Duke Kazimir Jahajlavič

CHRONOLOGY

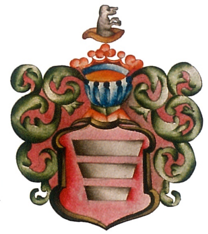
1468 – Statute of Kazimir, first law code of the state
1529 – First Statute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania
1566 – Second Statute of the Grand Duchy
1588 – Third Statute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania



Statute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania of 1588. Printed by the Mamonič brothers in Vilnia



Chancellor Lieŭ Sapieha, one of the creators of the 1588 Statute. Engraving by Antoni Oleszczyński. 1833

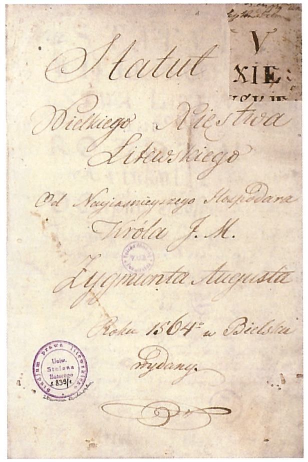


Karčak coat of arms, known in the Grand Duchy since the 1413 Union of Horodło. It was used by about 80 noble clans (the Baratynski, Branavicki, Ilinič, Katovič, Liaščynski, Mialieška, Prakapovič, Zaranka and other families)

The legislative basis for this Statute were the two previous editions of 1529 and 1566, Grand Ducal decrees and resolutions of the Diets and local dietines. It incorporated both the rich legal tradition of the Belarusian people dating right back to the times of the Principality of Polacak, and the more recent achievements of European legal thinking.

The Statute was written and published in Belarusian. The overwhelming majority of the population could read and understand the text. This was in contrast to the countries of Western Europe where the laws were written in Latin and therefore incomprehensible to ordinary people.

The Statute proclaimed the idea of a state based on the rule of law. In other words, all state institutions and office holders were obliged to be guided solely by the law in all their actions. In the Dedication to Žyhimont Vaza (Sigismund III Vasa, Zygmunt III Waza) and all the estates of the realm Lieŭ Sapieha wrote, 'We shall protect our liberties in all things, because not only our neighbour and any other citizen of our country, but even our Lord Sovereign himself enjoys no superiority over us, except as is permitted to him by the law.'



One of the numerous later editions of the Third Statute in Polish

Criminal law is covered extensively in the Statute. It introduces the concept of 'presumption of innocence', according to which a person is to be considered innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.



Deed drawn up between the nobleman Jacak Bahdanovič and Piotr Aliachnovič, Master of the Grand Ducal Kitchens for the sale of a meadow. Signed in Horadnia in 1498



Žyhimont Vaza.
Portrait from the Third Statute
of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania

The Grand Duke was obliged to defend the country's territorial integrity and to win back lands that had previously been lost. Foreigners (and this primarily meant Poles) were not permitted to occupy offices of state, or acquire land or honorary titles.

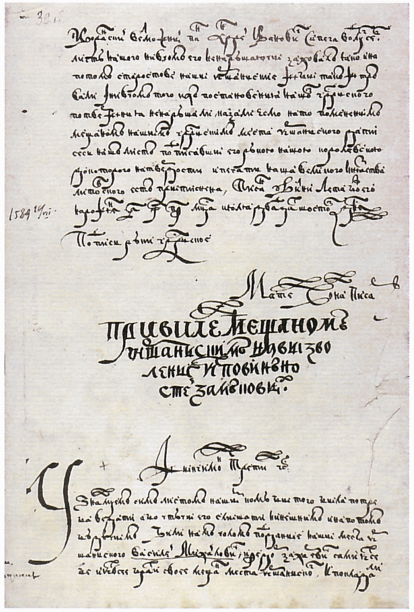
According to the law, no freeman could be reduced to serf status for life for any crime. Every freeman had the right to go and live abroad, provided this was not to the detriment of the Grand Duchy.

At the same time the Statute reflects the inequalities that existed between the inhabitants of the Grand Duchy who enjoyed personal freedom. The blood money for the murder of a highly-placed official of a town with the Magdeburg Law, *eg* a *vojt* (bailiff), *burmistr* (mayor) or *laŭnik* (magistrate) amounted to 50 *kopy* (one *kapa* = threescore, 60) of *hrošy*. The life of an ordinary townsman was worth 30 *kopy*, whereas that of a nobleman cost 100 *kopy*. Ordinary townsfolk could not participate in the state diets or even in the county dietines.

A nobleman had to answer before the law for the murder of a commoner. The death sentence could not be applied to pregnant women. The law provided for more severe penalties in cases of crimes against women. By comparison with other European countries the system of punishments was more humane: children and young people under the age of 18 could not be charged with a crime. Neither could the mentally ill, nor persons who had committed a crime 'out of unsound mind'.

The Third Statute was the supreme achievement of legal thinking in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. It was ratified by Grand Duke Žyhimont Vaza in 1588. The Statute was the most advanced and complete law code in Europe at the time.

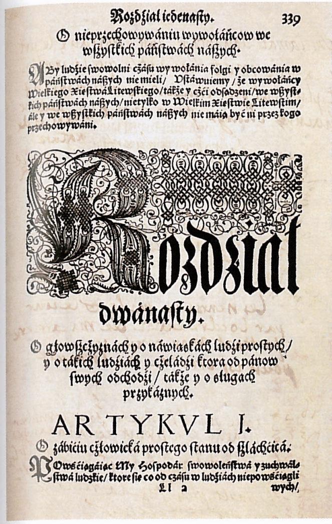
The Statute affirmed the sovereignty of the Grand Duchy, set out both its social and political structures, and the workings of its legal system. It clarified the rights and duties of the citizens. The Statute enshrined in law the idea of religious tolerance and protected the rights of all citizens, irrespective of their faith.



Decree granted to the citizens of Vorša, freeing them from feudal duties on crown lands. 1589

Title page of the Polish translation of the Third Statute, printed by the Mamonič brothers. 1614





Page from the Polish edition of the Third Statute

The Statute exerted considerable influence on legal thinking in Poland, Ukraine, Latvia, Estonia and Russia.

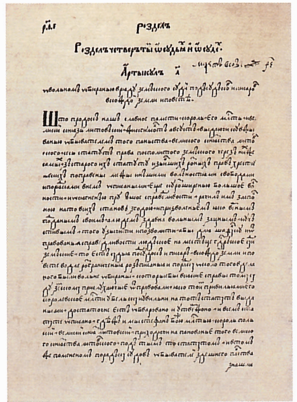
The Statute confirmed Belarusian as the state language of the Grand Duchy. It was used for the writing of official documents and all correspondence emanating from the Grand Ducal Chancellery. The rulers and all senior state officials spoke and wrote in it on a daily basis.

The Statute offered greater protection to the natural resources of the country than do some modern-day laws. Anyone who destroyed a falcon's or swan's nest received a fine of between three and six *kopy* of *hrošy*; the fine for trapping or shooting a beaver was between two and four *kopy*. (For purposes of comparison: at that time a stallion or a working ox cost two *kopy*.)

In the Preface to the Statute Lieŭ Sapieha emphasises the importance of Belarusian as the state language, 'If it is shameful for a nation not to know its own laws, it is even more so for us, who have our laws written not in any foreign tongue, but in our own, so that whenever any wrong is done to us we may know what redress we can seek.'

Two centuries after the Statute was adopted in 1588 it was still regarded as the most advanced legal code in Europe. A delegate to the Diet of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1791 put it this way, 'The Statute does honour to human reason. It is put together in such a rational manner, especially as the types of punishment are concerned, that it may be considered the most perfect volume of laws in the whole of Europe.'

The Third Statute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania remained in force as the sole source of legal authority even after the Russian Empire had seized Belarus – until 1831 in the governorates of Viciebsk and Mahilioŭ, and until 1840 in the governorates of Miensk, Horadnia and Vilnia.



Page from the 1588 Statute, the law code in use in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania for more than two centuries

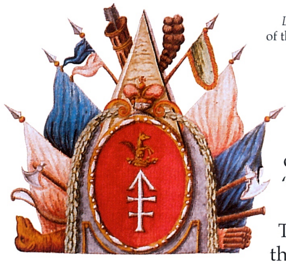


Medal depicting Vilnia. Silver-gilt, embossed. 1626



Land Claims Court (left) and County Court. Drawings. 1594

LIEŬ SAPIEHA



Lis coat of arms of the Sapieha family

Lieŭ Sapieha came from an old Orthodox Belarusian family with roots in the Smaliensk Palatinate. He was born on 4 April 1557 in the village of Astroŭna (now in the Biešankovičy district, Viciebsk province). At the age of six he was sent off by his parents to Niaśviž, where Prince Mikalaj Radzivil 'the Black' became his guardian.

At that time Niaśviž was one of the cultural centres of the Grand Duchy. The school that the Radzivil family had founded there was famous for the quality of education it provided. It was in the printing shop in Niaśviž that Symon Budny, a philosopher keen to bring culture and learning to his fellow countrymen, published his Belarusian books. Mikalaj Radzivil was a Calvinist, but the atmosphere of tolerance that prevailed at his court implanted in the heart and mind of the young Sapieha a firm rejection of religious fanaticism in all its forms.

Lieŭ Sapieha's gift for learning, his outstanding abilities and knowledge of several languages were instrumental in Prince Radzivil's decision to send him, at the age of 13, together with his own sons to study at Leipzig University. While there Sapieha studied history, philosophy and law.



Chancellor Lieŭ Sapieha. 17th-century portrait in oils by an unknown artist

Lieŭ Sapieha was a model statesman of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania – a patriot, wise politician, skilled diplomat and generous patron of the arts.



Lieŭ Sapieha's coat of arms on a page of the Third Statute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. 1588

CHRONOLOGY

1557–1633 – Lieŭ Sapieha's life and work

1581 – establishment of the Tribunal of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania



Ružany, family property of the Sapieha princes. Lithograph after a drawing by Napalieon Orda. Mid-19th century



Family heirloom of the princely Sapieha clan – an icon of the Virgin and Child

He graduated from university well-equipped to play an important political role in the history of his country. His erudition and outstanding command of Latin amazed Grand Duke and King Ściapan Batura. Acting on the advice of his guardians, the Radzivils, he remained at the monarch's court to defend the interests of the Grand Duchy, which were potentially threatened by the increasing closeness to Poland following the 1569 Union of Lublin.

Sapieha was not quite 23 years of age when he was appointed Secretary of the Grand Duchy. As an ardent patriot he pursued a successful policy of restraining the King's attempts to establish complete hegemony over the Grand Duchy. Sapieha's position was strengthened by the part he played in the Livonian War. At his own expense he created and equipped a regiment of hussars. He won renown for himself at the head of this regiment both in the battle at Vialikija Luki and during the siege of Pskov.

At the end of the war he headed a diplomatic mission to Moscow and signed a peace treaty, under the terms of which Muscovy was compelled to return Polacak and Livonia to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. This was a great diplomatic triumph. Back home he was appointed first Deputy Chancellor and then Chancellor, *ie* the second man in the state, fulfilling the functions of two ministers – one of internal affairs, and the other of foreign affairs.

Lieŭ Sapieha held the office of Chancellor for more than 30 years. He determined the internal and foreign policies of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Sapieha supervised the compilation of the 1588 Statute. Printed by the Mamonič brothers in Vilnia

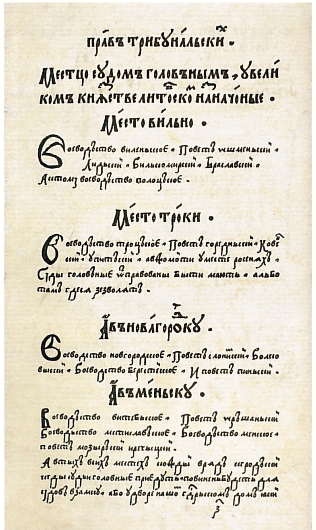




Lieŭ Sapieha, Chancellor
of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.
Etching on copper by Michal Padalinski
(Michał Podoliński). 1819

Lieŭ Sapieha was in charge of the compilation of the Third Statute of the Grand Duchy. This was the most advanced codification of law in Europe at that time. Its adoption in 1588 was a major political victory for Sapieha. The Statute defended the Grand Duchy from absorption by Poland; it contained articles affirming the Grand Duchy's autonomy within the Commonwealth and barring Poles from holding office in the state or acquiring land. The new code of laws was personally supervised by Sapieha; he both wrote prefaces for it and paid for it to be printed.

Even though he was a Catholic, Chancellor Sapieha supported the union of the Orthodox and Catholic churches. In his view such a union would serve to strengthen the state. In his letters Sapieha frequently warned that violence should not be used against opponents of the Uniates.



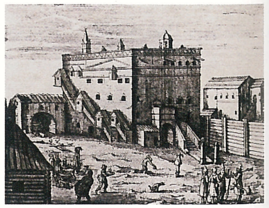


The Code
on which the Tribunal
of the Grand Duchy
of Lithuania based its work.
Title page (left)
and later page (right).
Vilnia. 1586

Lieŭ Sapieha was directly involved in the establishment of the Tribunal of the Grand Duchy – the supreme appeal court of the country. The Tribunal played a great part in strengthening the autonomy of the Grand Duchy. Its rulings had the force of decisions taken by the Diet.



Ambassadors
from European states
on their way to Muscovy.
16th-century engraving



Ambassadors'
Court in Moscow,
where diplomats from
the Grand Duchy stayed.
17th-century engraving





Books from the library
of Lieŭ Sapieha and his sons,
donated in the middle
of the 17th century
to the Library
of the Vilnia Academy

Towards the end of his life Sapieha served several years as Grand Hetman. Here too he proved himself to be a talented military commander and a man who placed the interests of his country above all else. When the Swedes attacked the Grand Duchy he and his son Jan together gave away their wealth for the fight against the enemy.

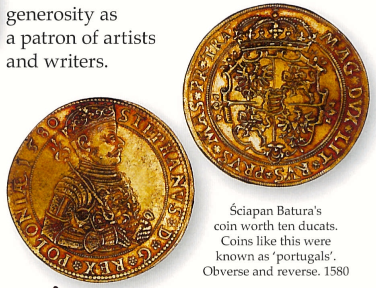
Sapieha was notable for his generosity as a patron of artists and writers.



Honorary shield
of Lieŭ Sapieha
bearing the *Lis* coat of arms.
Bronze-gilt.
From the Czartoryski
Museum in Puławy, Poland



This tile bearing
the Sapieha family coat
of arms once adorned
a house in Zaslaŭje
in the 17th century



Ściapan Batura's
coin worth ten ducats.
Coins like this were
known as 'portugals'.
Obverse and reverse. 1580

Concerned for the good governance of the state, he had hundreds of volumes of the Grand Duchy's *Metrica* (legal documents of the Chancellery) systematised and copied. The documents contained in the collection are effectively the state archives, an invaluable historical source. Lieŭ Sapieha was also a generous benefactor of the many Catholic churches his family had founded; after his death in 1633 he was buried in one of them, the Church of St Michael the Archangel in Vilnia.

Andrej Rymša wrote a panegyric to Lieŭ Sapieha's coat of arms:

In these his ancestors
Did virtue flourish,
and so with lilies three
The armed and mounted
warrior stands,
A sign that none of them
is fear'd
To serve his sovereign
in his every need,
Sparing not his treasures
nor himself.



Effigial monument
above the Sapieha tomb
in the Church of St Michael
the Archangel in Vilnia

THE REFORMATION



Engraving from the Luther Bible. 1534



Protestant Bible published in Polish in 1563 by a printing shop in Bieraście. The publication was ordered and financed by Mikalaj Radzivil 'the Black'

In the first half of the 16th century most of the population of Belarus were Orthodox by religion. The 'Greek' faith was professed by 23 princely families and 42 families of the nobility. During the reign of Grand Duke Žyhimont the Old in 1511 there were 14 Orthodox churches and 7 Catholic ones in Vilnia. In Navahradak there were 10 Orthodox churches and only one Catholic church. In Mahilioŭ, Amścislaŭ and Vorša there were no Catholic churches until the beginning of the 17th century.

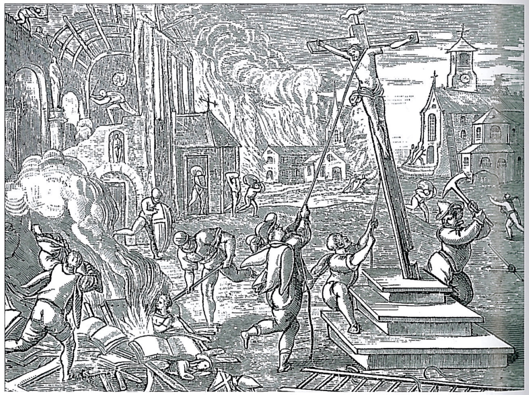
However, the position of the Catholic Church was growing stronger all the time. Monastic orders enjoyed the support of the Grand Dukes to expand their activities. The rulers of the state were generous in their donations to the Bishopric of Vilnia. It came to own 11,500 peasant households and was thereby transformed into a large-scale landowner.



John Calvin, founder of a movement within the Reformation that came to be known as Calvinism. His ideas spread widely throughout Belarus. Old engraving by an unknown artist

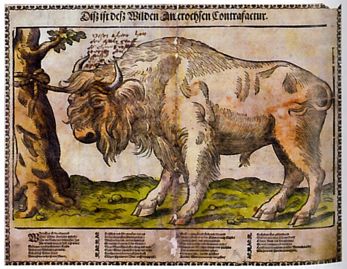


Title page of Martin Luther's translation of the New Testament. 1546



Destruction of churches and sacred objects during disturbances between Catholics and Protestants in France. Engraving of the time

Orthodoxy was going through a period of crisis for which there were internal reasons. The Orthodox Church was too conservative and unable to accept the changes that were then taking place in European culture.



German broadsheet depicting a Belarusian bison presented to a Saxonian magnate. 16th century

CHRONOLOGY

1530–1593 – life and work of Symon Budny

1562 – Budny publishes his *Catechesis* in Niaśviž

c 1580 – Vasil Ciapinski publishes his Belarusian translation of the Gospels





Mikalaj Radzivil 'the Black', Palatine of Vilnia and Chancellor of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, one of the first Belarusian magnates to support the ideas of the Reformation (left)

Portrait of Januš Radzivil, Palatine of Vilnia and Grand Hetman, a firm opponent of the Inquisition (right)

Engravings by Hierška Liajbovič. Mid-18th century

Orthodox priests were all too often poorly educated. They could not even understand the Church Slavonic language in which they prayed, and were usually unable to compete with the well-educated Catholic clergy.

Once they had gained equality with the Catholics in the state, the Orthodox Belarusian nobility were eager for education. The Orthodox fraternity and parish schools could not provide a university-level education. For that young people would have to go the West.

It is from Western Europe that the ideas of the Reformation reached Belarus. They triggered a crisis in both the Orthodox and Catholic churches in the Grand Duchy.

The Reformation affected almost all European countries. Its supporters opposed the unlimited power of the Catholic Church and its enormous wealth. They rejected the ornate services, seeking instead to regain the original purity of the Christian doctrine. However in Belarus, unlike Western Europe, the Reformation movement did not spread to the masses. For the most part it influenced the magnates and their clientele among the nobility, *ie* those who, among other things, were counting on a redistribution of the Catholic Church property. The Reformation was also felt in some sections of the urban population.

By the middle of the 16th century there were Protestant communities in Niaśviž, Bieraście, Kliecak, Navahradak, Kojdanava and dozens of other Belarusian towns. Evangelicals, as the supporters of the Reformation were called, formed a majority on the Grand Ducal Council in the 1560s.

By supporting the Reformation the great clans of Belarus – *eg* the Radzivil, Sapieha, Hliabovič, Kiška and Chadkievič families – were demonstrating their desire to break away from Catholic Poland and so strengthen the independence of the Grand Duchy.

Dispute. Engraving from Francišak Skaryna's translation of Ecclesiasticus. Prague. 1517



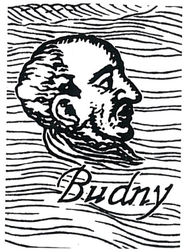


Allegorical depiction of a dragon. From the Luther Bible

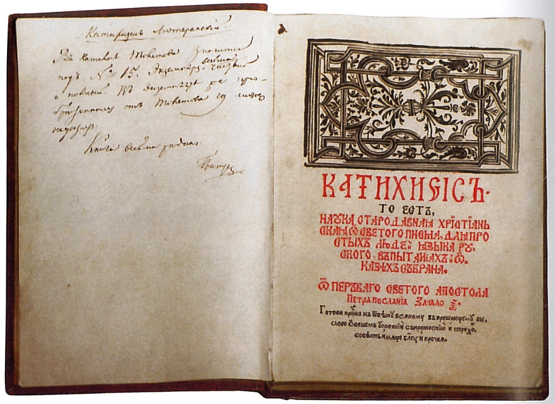
The Reformation actively favoured the advancement of learning and the general spiritual life of society. Schools, printing shops, hospitals and houses of refuge sprang up wherever there were Evangelical communities. The culture of the Grand Duchy was greatly enriched by the achievements of European philosophical thought. Belarusian thinkers came to stand on equal terms with like-minded people in the West.

The Reformers in Belarus

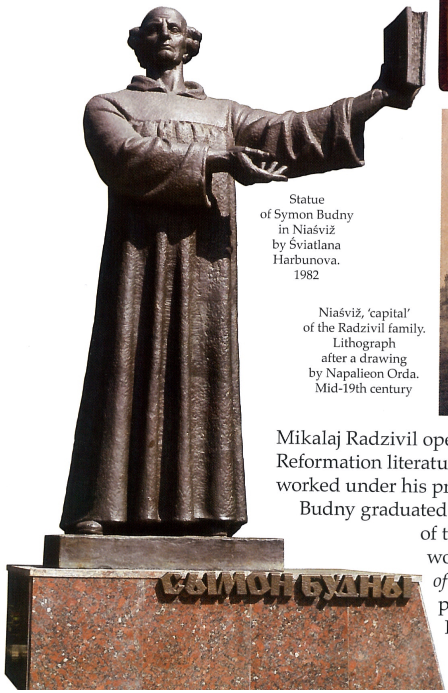
The first of the magnates to support the Reformation was the famous statesman and patron of the arts Mikalaj Radzivil 'the Black', Palatine of Vilnia and Chancellor of the Grand Duchy. He was an ardent supporter of the Grand Duchy's sovereignty.



Symon Budny, one of the leading figures of the Reformation in Belarus. 16th-century caricature-like portrait



Budny's *Catechesis*. Niaśviž. 1562



Statue of Symon Budny in Niaśviž by Śviatlana Harbunova. 1982



Niaśviž, 'capital' of the Radzivil family. Lithograph after a drawing by Napalieon Orda. Mid-19th century

Mikalaj Radzivil opened printing shops in Bieraście and Niaśviž, which published Reformation literature. Symon Budny, one of the most educated people of his time, worked under his protection.

Budny graduated from Kraków University. In 1562 he took charge of the printing shop in Niaśviž where he published his own works written in Belarusian, the *Catechesis* and *On the justification of sinful man before God*. Symon Budny was one of the foremost propagators of the ideas of the Reformation in Belarus. In defence of his views he expanded his publishing activities.



Prince Mikalaj Kryštop Radzivil 'the Orphan'. Engraving on copper by Lucas Kilian. First half of the 17th century



Title page of Mikalaj Krzyštop Radzivil's book *Hierosolymitana Peregrinatio*, a description of his journey to the Holy Land, undertaken after his conversion from Calvinism to Catholicism. 1601



Vasiĺ Ciapinski, translator of the Gospels into Belarusian. Woodcut. 1576



Page from Ciapinski's Gospels. 1575

The magnate Jan Kiška, a supporter of the Arian trend in the Reformation, had founded a printing shop in Losk. It was here that Budny printed a New Testament with his own preface and commentaries and two tracts, *On the two natures of Christ* and *On secular authority*. Budny advocated the creative freedom of the individual and opposed all forms of religious fanaticism.

The notable figure of Vasiĺ Ciapinski, a nobleman from the Polacak Palatinate with personal ties to Budny, was another figure of the Reformation in Belarus. In the printing shop that he established on the Ciapina estate he published his own translation of the Gospels. In the preface to this volume he defends the Belarusian language as well as the history and traditions of the Belarusian people.

The Reformation was eventually followed, in both Europe and the Grand Duchy, by a period known as the Counter-Reformation. In the Grand Duchy, however, the Counter-Reformation was not marked by such cruelty as, for example, the St Bartholomew's Day massacre of 20,000 Huguenots by Catholics in France.

During the Counter-Reformation almost the entire Belarusian aristocracy converted to Catholicism.

Calvinist church in Zaslaŭje. Second half of the 16th – early 17th centuries



THE CHURCH UNION OF BIERAŚCIE



Seal
of the Uniate Order
of the Basilian Fathers.
Rubbing

Catholicism began to spread through Belarus after the union of the Polish Kingdom with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, bringing with it the threat of increased Polish influence. At the same time a Patriarchate was established in Moscow in 1589; this meant that the patriarchs and tsars would together regard Belarus as their legitimate patrimony and be prepared to use its inhabitants' Orthodox faith as a pretext for seizing control of it. A new faith that would combine in a single Church both Catholicism and Orthodoxy, would help to defeat the claims of both Warsaw and Moscow as well as avert the threat posed by hostility between the different religious factions within the Grand Duchy itself. This was well understood by both the secular and religious leaders of the Grand Duchy who supported the country's independence.



The Žyrovičy monastery near Slonim became one of the most powerful Uniate centres in the Commonwealth. Žyrovičy Mother of God. Uniate icon of the mid-18th century. Church of the Dormition in Bycień, Ivacevičy district. Belarusian school

At the Bieraście Church Synod in 1596 the Belarusian and Ukrainian Orthodox bishops recognised the supremacy of the Pope and the Catholic dogmas, but retained the earlier 'Greek' rituals.



St Nicholas' Church,
where the Union of Bieraście was signed.
18th-century engraving

CHRONOLOGY

9 October 1596 – Church Synod in Bieraście proclaims the Union of the Orthodox and Catholic Churches in the Commonwealth

1623 – Uniate Archbishop of Polacak Jazafat Kuncevič murdered

Such a faith could result from a union of the two Churches.

This idea came to fruition in 1596 at the Church Synod held in Bieraście.

It was the Archbishop of Polacak, Jazafat Kuncevič, who played the leading role in establishing the Uniate faith in Belarus. He was a talented preacher and energetic church leader, but, according to some sources, did not always show sufficient tolerance.



Seal
of Ipat Paciej



Uniate Metropolitan Ipat Paciej, known as a talented polemicist. 19th-century engraving



St Jazafat Kuncevič, Archbishop of Polacak.
19th-century engraving



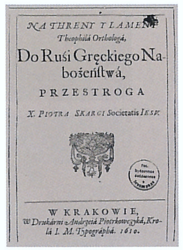
Collection of writings by Jazafat Kuncevič. Supraśl. 1700

The Uniates established an excellent education system and used the Belarusian language in churches, as well as schools and book printing.

Against the Archbishop of Polacak stood the fraternities formed by the Orthodox laity in the towns and supported by the still numerous Orthodox nobility.

In the autumn of 1623 the Uniate prelate died a martyr's death during riots in Viciebsk. He was later canonised.

In spite of the hostility, the new Church steadily gained ground and the pressure put on the Orthodox ceased.



NA THRENY Y LAMENT
Theophila Orthologa,
Do Rusi Greckiego Nabożeństwá,
PRZESTROGA
X. PIOTRA SKARGI Societatis IESU.
W KRAKOWIE,
W Drukarni Andrzeia Piotrkowczyká, Krolá I. M. Typographá. 1610.

Title page of Piotra Skarga's polemical work *Na threny y lament Theofila Orthologa do Rusi greckiego nabożeństwa przestroga* (A Warning to the Ruthenian people of the Greek faith on the occasion of Theofil Orthologa's weepings and lamentations). Kraków. 1610



Piotra Skarha, one of the initiators of the Union of Bieraście, first Rector of the Vilnia Academy. Painting by an unknown artist of the 17th century



Medal struck to commemorate the Church Union of Bieraście. Silver-coated copper. Reverse

When speaking of the historic fate of the Belarusians, some authors compare the Church Union with the defeat of the Teutonic Knights at Grunwald. Just as the defeat of the Knights averted the physical annihilation of the Belarusians, so did the Union of the Churches rescue them from spiritual extinction. This was first and foremost achieved thanks to the fact that the living language of the people was used in Uniate churches and monasteries – in sermons, teaching and in church chants.

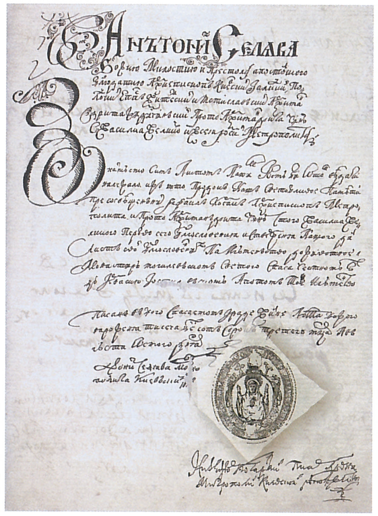
By the end of the 18th century three quarters of the inhabitants of Belarus were Uniates. They knew full well that they were neither Poles nor Russians. It is for that reason that the Union was hated so much by the tsars of Muscovy and their lackeys in ecclesiastical robes.



Jazep Rucki, founder of the Order of Basilian Fathers, writer, teacher and preacher. 19th-century engraving after an older original



Portrait of the Uniate Metropolitan Cypryjan Žachoŭski. By an unknown artist. 1680. From the Radzivil collection in Niaśviž



Official document of Anton Sialiava, Archbishop of Polacak, Kyiv and Halych



Flaryjan Hrabnicki, Archbishop of Polacak. During his period of office the Cathedral of St Sophia was rebuilt after its destruction by the soldiers of Petr I. 19th-century drawing



Gospel according to St John. 16th-century Belarusian manuscript



St Paraskieva. Icon of the second half of the 16th century. Belarusian school

The new Church was successful precisely because it was a national church for the people. This is how it was viewed by such figures from later Belarusian history as Kastuś Kalinoŭski, Maksim Bahdanovič and Vaclaŭ Lastoŭski. Friedrich Engels, who had made a thorough study of the history of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, interpreted the Uniate Church in that way, too.

By the second half of the 17th century only one of the 13 Orthodox monasteries and convents in Miensk continued to adhere to the earlier faith. Both the famous monastery in Žyrovičy and the Cathedral of St Sophia in Polacak became Uniate. St Sophia's eventually came to be the focal point for Uniate pilgrimages.

The Union was born for political reasons, but continued as a determining factor in the fate of the nation.

The position of the Uniate Church was strengthened in the early 17th century by the founding of the monastic Order of the Basilian Fathers. It took the name of one of the Fathers of the Church, St Basil the Great. The Basilian Fathers printed religious books and opened schools and colleges attached to their monasteries. It is sometimes asserted that the Basilian Fathers, and indeed the Uniates in general, 'danced to the Jesuits' tune'. The documents prove otherwise. The Basilian Fathers and the Jesuits were involved in a court case over the Cross of St Eŭfrasińnia; the Basilians refused to hand over the holy relic. In 1802 the Jesuits, who at the time enjoyed the support of the tsarist authorities, took the Basilian Fathers of Polacak and Vušačy to court. Their complaint was that the Fathers had allegedly claimed, 'The Roman religion does not accord with the Holy Gospels.'

The Church Union is a crucial element in the history and culture of Belarus. It is the faith of many generations of Belarusians.



Part of the binding of the Gospels. End of the 17th century. Descent into Hell – Resurrection. Church of the Mother of God Hodegetria in Dzisna

THE CENTURY OF BLOODSHED



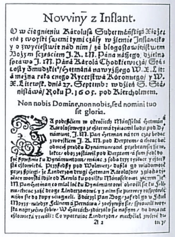
Commemorative medal struck in honour of Grand Hetman Jan Karol̂ Chadkievič by Jozeph Lang. Silver. Obverse. 1800

The Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and especially that part of it which is now Belarus, had scarcely had time for the deep wounds left by the Livonian War to heal, when the madness of war once again swept across the country. In 1609 the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth began a campaign to regain Smaliensk and other lost territories. With the active support of the Muscovite nobility the army of the Commonwealth entered Moscow in 1610 and subsequently took Smaliensk by storm. Two years passed before a Russian force of irregulars under Minin and Pozharskii succeeded in liberating the Muscovite capital. Both sides were exhausted by the long war that ensued; it was eventually brought to an end by the Treaty of Deulino signed in 1618. Under the terms of the treaty the Grand Duchy recovered the lands of Smaliensk, Chernihiv and Novhorod-Sivers'kyi together with 30 towns.



Forces of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth lay siege to Smaliensk. Engraving by Georg Keller. 1610

News from Livonia – broadsheet with report of the victory of the army of the Commonwealth over Swedes at Kircholm in 1605



Novviny z Inflant.

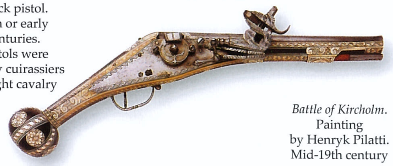
O wćiągnieniu Károluſá Sudermáńſkiego Xiążęćiá z woyſki ſwemi tymi czáſy w ziemie Inflantſką y o zwyćięſtwie nád nim / zá błogosłáwieńſtwem Bożym ſcześćiem J. K. M. Páná náſzego dzielną ſpráwą J. M. Páná Károlá Chodkiewiczá / Stároſty Zmudzkie° / Hetmáná náwyżſzego W. X. Lit: á mężną ręką cnego Rycerſtwá Koronnego / y W. X. Litewſk. dniá 27. Septemb: w dźień S. Stániſłáwá / Roku P. 1605. pod Kircholmem.

Non nobis Domine, non nobis, ſed nomini tuo ſit gloria.



Cuirassier's armour of the time

Wheellock pistol. Late 16th or early 17th centuries. Such pistols were favoured by cuirassiers and the light cavalry



Battle of Kircholm. Painting by Henryk Pilatti. Mid-19th century



CHRONOLOGY

1600–1629 – war between the Commonwealth and Sweden
27 September 1605 – victory at Kircholm (Salaspils)
1609–1618 – war between the Commonwealth and Russia
1632–1634 – war between Russia and the Commonwealth
1648–1651 – Cossack-peasant war in Belarus
1654–1667 – war between Russia and the Commonwealth
1 February 1661 – uprising in Mahilioŭ

Gryf coat of arms borne by the ancestors of Grand Hetman Chadkievič



At the same time as conducting military campaigns against Russia, the Commonwealth was fighting the Swedes for supremacy on the Baltic Sea. In 1605 one of the greatest military commanders of the Grand Duchy, Jan Karol̂ Chadkievič, won a stunning victory at Kircholm (now Salaspils in Latvia). Leading an army of 4,000 men, he completely smashed a 14,000-strong Swedish force. The Swedes lost some 9,000 of their soldiers.



Jan Karol̂ Chadkievič, one of the greatest military commanders of his time in Europe. Portrait by an unknown artist of the 17th century

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 17th century





Medal depicting Grand Duke and King Jan Kazimir (John II Casimir, Jan II Kazimierz). By medallier Johann Hoehn. Copper. Obverse. 1657

Soldiers on parade. Late 17th-century drawing



Belarusian 'winged' hussar. Huge 'wings' of feathers were attached to the hussar's armour with the purpose of instilling fear into the enemy. 'Winged' hussars were Chadkievič's favourite troops. Modern replica by the Miensk armoury workshop *Koŭnia*





Surrender of the Russian commander Shein at Smaliensk in 1634. Fragment of the relief on the sarcophagus of Grand Duke and King Uladzislaŭ Vaza (Vladislaus IV Vasa, Władysław IV Waza). Wawel Castle in Kraków



Vincent Aliaksandr Hasieŭski, General of Artillery and later Field Hetman of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, fought in the wars with Sweden and Russia. By an unknown artist. Mid-17th century



Cutlass, used for both fighting and hunting

A new war, the worst in Belarusian history, burst upon the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1654. Contemporaries referred to it as 'the deluge of blood'.



Hussar's armour. First half of the 17th century

Russia started another war in 1632. The Tsar's troops occupied Polacak, Druja, Aśvieja and Prapojsk (Prapošasak), and laid siege to Smaliensk. After several battles, however, the Russian army under commander Mikhail Shein was driven back from Smaliensk, encircled and forced to capitulate. Once back in Moscow, Shein was tried by the Boyar Council and executed.

1648 marked the beginning of the war for the liberation of Ukraine. The Ukrainian Hetman Bohdan Khmel'nits'kyi rebelled against the authority of the Commonwealth and despatched Cossack units northwards into Belarus to urge the peasants to take up arms against the magnates and nobility. The Cossacks received some support from the local population.



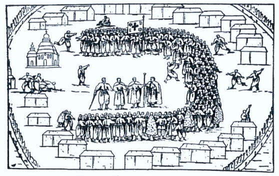
The nobility bore the brunt of defending the Commonwealth. Belarusian nobleman of the 17th century. 19th-century engraving

Commonwealth army before Smaliensk. 17th-century engraving





Mykhailo Krychevs'kyi, Cossack colonel, who fought in the war against Sweden, subsequently an ally of Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi. Posthumous engraving. 1649



Cossack Council of the Zaporizhian Sich. Engraving of the time



Hajduks. From *Hetman* by Bartłomiej Paprocki. Kraków. 1578

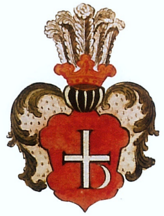
The whole of southern Belarus was eventually occupied by the Cossacks. They not only destroyed the landowners' estates, but also plundered the common people and massacred Jews. At the head of an army of 10,000 men Hetman Januš Radzivil set off to pacify the region. The regiments of nobility were well-armed; they captured town after town, meting out harsh punishment to the Cossacks and their allies. The greatest battle of the war of 1648–1651 in Belarus was fought on 31 July 1649 near Lojeŭ. The army of the Grand Duchy was able to celebrate a victory. The Cossack forces were routed, losing 8,000 men killed and 3,000 drowned in the Dnieper. This war brought nothing to either the rebels or the state but death and destruction.



Cossack colonel. 19th-century lithograph



Portrait of Hetman Januš Radzivil. By Daniel Schulz. 1652



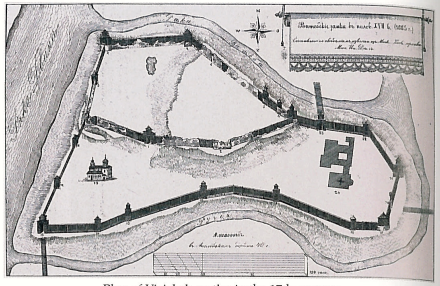
Tarnava coat of arms, used by more than ten noble Belarusian clans (the Branieŭski, Malčeŭski, Radkievič, Sinicki, Tarasievič and Varoŭski families)



Litvin and Polish hussars led by Stanisław Żołkiewski. Fragment of painting *Battle of Klushin* by Symon Bahuševič. Mid-17th century



Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich of Muscovy, the 'most peaceful', unleashed a war aimed at the destruction of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Engraving. 1672



Plan of Viciebsk castles in the 17th century

Using weasel words about defending Orthodoxy from the oppression of the 'accursed Polacks', Muscovy unleashed another war in 1654. At first the promises of Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich to preserve the rights and property of the Belarusian nobility and to ensure a peaceful life for all the Orthodox faithful in Belarus had quite a significant impact on the areas of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania which bordered on Russia.

Belarus was invaded by three huge armies aided by three regiments of Cossacks sent by Khmel'nyts'kyi. Against this force of 100,000 men stood the corps of Hetman Januš Radzivil, numbering some ten times fewer soldiers. Among the towns captured by the Tsar's commanders Trubetskoi and Sheremet'ev, together with their Cossack allies under the command of Ataman Zolotarenko, were Viciebsk, Polacak, Vorša, Kryčaŭ, Amścislaŭ, Homieĺ, Rečyca, Škloŭ and Dubroŭna. Those towns which refused to capitulate and put up stout resistance were – on the Tsar's orders – destroyed and their inhabitants massacred or taken off into captivity. The town that suffered most was Amścislaŭ; Russian historical documents record that 'more than ten thousand people were killed – noblemen, Poles, Litvins and others'. Rečyca, Žlobin and Rahačoŭ were left in ruins. Viĺnia fell to the invaders in 1655.

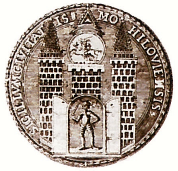
Forgetting all their sovereign's promises, the Muscovite army engaged in an orgy of rape and pillage on the occupied territories. The response was a widespread partisan movement which was particularly active in the area around Amścislaŭ. In July 1654 some 3,000 Belarusian peasants from around Kalieśniki attacked an army of 15,000 men under commander Trubetskoi. The citizens of Mahilioŭ, who had originally surrendered the city to the Russian army without a fight, could no longer stand the taunts and continual plundering of everything they owned and rose up in rebellion on 1 February 1661. In just a few hours they slaughtered the entire Muscovite garrison of 7,000 men.

The national liberation movement in Belarus gave the armies of the Commonwealth a chance to regroup and counterattack. In 1661 they recaptured Viĺnia. Regiments under the Muscovite commanders Ivan Khovanskii and Fedor Dolgorukii were destroyed in battles near Liachavičy, close to Polacak at Kušliki and on the river Basia in the Mahilioŭ lands.

The two exhausted countries began talks which ended in 1667 with the Truce of Andrusava. The Palatinates of Smaliensk and Chernihiv, together with all the Ukrainian territories up to the Dnieper ('left-bank' Ukraine) were ceded to Muscovy. Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich returned the whole of occupied northern Belarus and Livonia to the Commonwealth.



Armed Muscovites. Fragment of an engraving. 1601



Coat of arms of Mahilioŭ, granted to the city after the uprising of 1661. It depicts the brave action of the bailiff Lievanovič in giving the signal to start the townspeople's armed rebellion against the Tsar's garrison

Litvin noblemen





Battle with the Muscovites. Early 17th-century engraving



17th-century cavalryman of the Grand Duchy. Drawing by Juliusz Kossak. Second half of the 19th century



Siege of Bieraście by Swedish and Hungarian troops in 1657. Fragment of a 17th-century engraving

The wars of the middle of the 17th century had tragic consequences for Belarus. The population dropped from 2.9 million to 1.4 million. One person in every two perished. In the Palatinates of Polacak, Viciebsk and Amścislaŭ between 65% to 70% of the peasant cottages stood empty. Hundreds of thousands of Belarusians were forcibly resettled in Russia.



Commemorative medal struck in honour of the return of Smaliensk to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Silver. Obverse and reverse. 1636



Polychrome tile with cuckoos from the Tsar's palace in Kolomenskoe, built and decorated by Belarusians in the 17th century. By master craftsman Ściapan Palubies

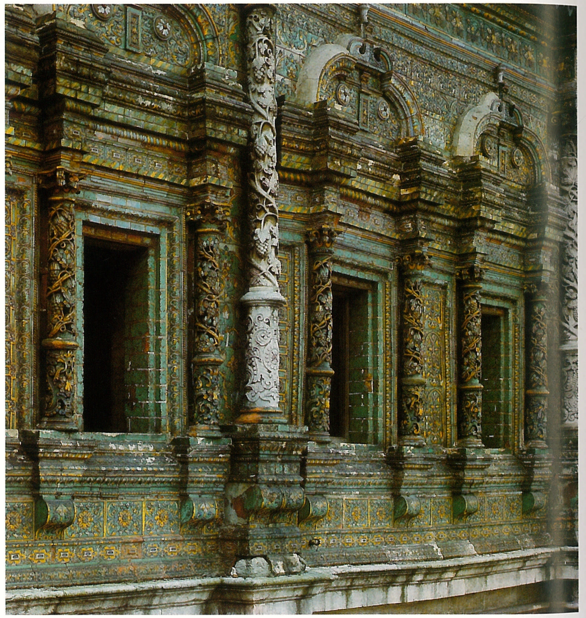
BELARUSIANS IN MUSCOVY

Master craftsmen

During the war of 1654–1667 with the Commonwealth the Tsar of Muscovy and his government resettled Belarusians from the occupied territories *en masse* in Russia. Nikon, Patriarch of Moscow, informed the Patriarch of Antioch that his sovereign intended 'to transport 300,000 people from Bielaja Ruś'. In fact the total number of people forcibly resettled was considerably greater. There were both peasants and noblemen among those moved eastwards; however, the most numerous group who had to bid farewell to their native land were craftsmen from the towns.

Belarusian tiling.
Detail of the decoration on the external wall of the vault of a side apse of the Cathedral of the Protective Veil of the Theotokos in Izmailovo, Moscow





Decoration of the main façade of the residence of the Metropolitans of Krutitsa in Moscow. Belarusian tile makers and tilers, including Ihnat Maksimaŭ and Ściapan Palubies, produced 1,170 large polychrome (in five colours) tiles with plant motifs in relief for the unique decoration of the building

It was the Belarusians who brought the art of relief carving to their eastern neighbours and so paved the way for the development of sculpture in Russia.

CHRONOLOGY

1629–1680 – life and work of Simiaon of Polacak
1667–1668 – Belarusian master craftsmen build the Tsar's palace in Kolomenskoe
1672 – Simiaon opens the first theatre in Russia
1683–1686 – creation of the iconostasis in the Smaliensk Cathedral of the Novodevichii Convent in Moscow
1691 – Ściapan Palubies produces the polychrome majolica reliefs of the apostles for the Church of the Dormition in Moscow

Patriarch Nikon settled the first group of Belarusian craftsmen and peasants at the Iverskii Monastery on Lake Valdai. They were soon joined by Orthodox monks from the Kuciejna Monastery near Vorša who brought a 'printing workshop' with them. After them came a large group of craftsmen from Vorša, Kopyś, Škloŭ and Dubroŭna – bookbinders, woodcarvers, and tilemakers.

Fragment of the iconostasis of the Smaliensk Cathedral in the Novodevichii Convent, Moscow. The frame of the iconostasis consists of 84 carved and gilt columns. This unique piece of art was the work of Belarusian master craftsmen, the wood carver Klim Michajlaŭ and the gilder Darafiej Zalataroŭ 'with their mates'



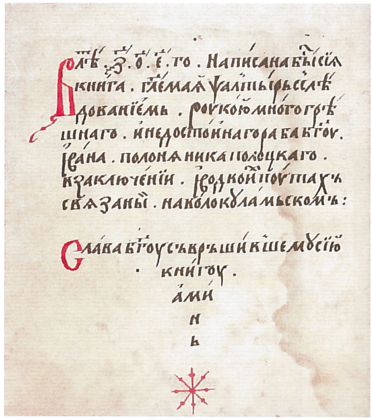


One of the numerous masterpieces produced by Belarusian tile makers: fragment of the exterior decoration of the Church of the Dormition in Gonchary. Moscow. 1689

Ihnat Maksimaŭ from Kopyś organised the production of polychrome relief tiles, previously unknown in Muscovy. Belarusian craftsmen used them to decorate all the monastery buildings. Printers from Belarus set about producing a whole range of books – the *Horologion*, the *Menologion*, Nikon's own *Paradise of Reason*, Akathist hymns – illustrated with engravings by Paisij, a monk from Vorša.

After working on the Iverskii Monastery, the Belarusian master tilers worked on the Cathedral of the Resurrection in the Monastery of the New Jerusalem on the river Istra to the west of Moscow, the Terem Palace of the Moscow Kremlin, the Krutitskii Terem and the Church of St Gregory of Neocaesarea also in Moscow. Two Belarusians became especially famous for their tile-making skills: Piotra Zaborski and Ściapan Palubies.

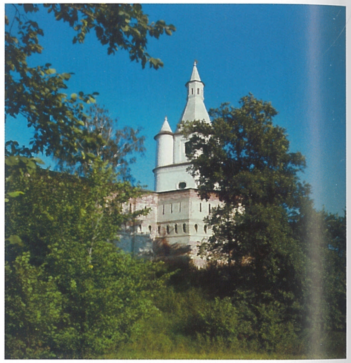
The grandeur and artistry of the gilt five-tier iconostasis in the Smaliensk Cathedral of the Novodevichii Convent in Moscow still astound tourists and churchgoers alike. Unfortunately very few people are aware that this masterpiece was created by a workshop of Belarusian craftsmen headed by a woodcarver from Škloŭ named Klim Michajlaŭ.



Belarusians had been forcibly resettled in Muscovy since the end of the 15th century. One among the many pieces of evidence of this is the page from a Russian Psalter of the second half of the 16th century, copied by 'Ivan, a prisoner from Polacak'

The number of Belarusians working at the Tsar's court grew rapidly. By 1662 there were 43 craftsmen from Polacak, Viciebsk, Vorša and other Belarusian towns employed in the Silver Workshop. In Kolomenskoe, Tsar Aleksei's residence just outside Moscow, Belarusians produced relief wood carvings covered in gold leaf, tiled stoves and uniquely patterned window frames. The work was overseen by *starac* (elder master craftsman) Arsień and Klim Michajlaŭ, who were later to take charge of the Tsar's Carpentry and Woodcarving Works.







The towers of the Monastery of the New Jerusalem on the Istra, Moscow province. Constructed by the Belarusian master builder Jakaŭ Buchvostaŭ. 17th century

Belarusian tiles on the exterior of the Cathedral of the Protecting Veil of the Theotokos in Izmailovo. The master craftsmen Ihnat Maksimaŭ and Ściapan Palubies produced 7,130 polychrome tiles to decorate the building



Tile rosette from Kolomenskoe. By master craftsman Ściapan Palubies

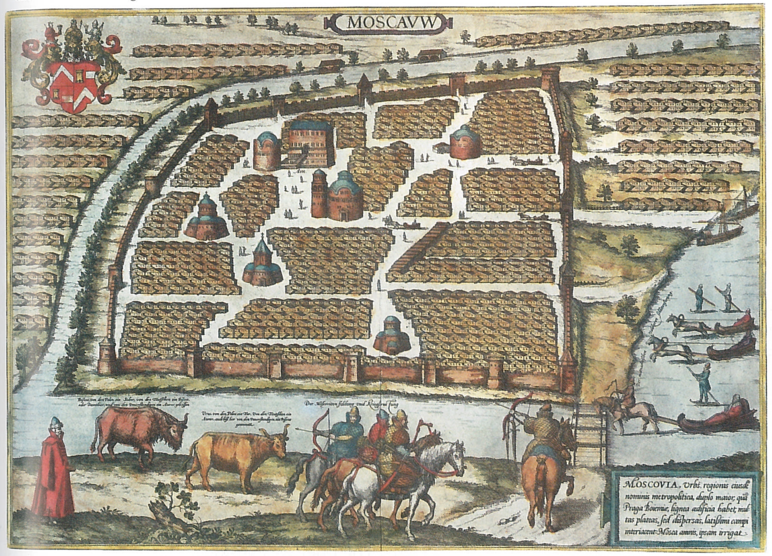


Tile depicting apostle. Fragment of exterior decoration of the Church of the Dormition in Gonchary, Moscow

Resettled Belarusians made up one fifth of the population of Moscow in the second half of the 17th century.

In 1672 Simiaon of Polacak established the first court theatre in Russia. The actors were Belarusians from the Meshchanskaia Quarter.

In the late 17th century a large number of Belarusian artists worked in Moscow. Among them were Ryhor Adoĺski, Haŭryla Arystoŭski, Astap Ivanoŭ, Jerafiej Jalina, Stanislaŭ Lapucki, Siamion Lisicki, Ivan Machoŭski, Ivan Miroŭski, Ihnat Palonski, Kipryjan Umbranoŭski, and Ściapan Zarucki. The one whose talent was held in the highest esteem was Vasiĺ Paznanski. He was entrusted with orders from both the Tsar's court and Patriarch Nikon.

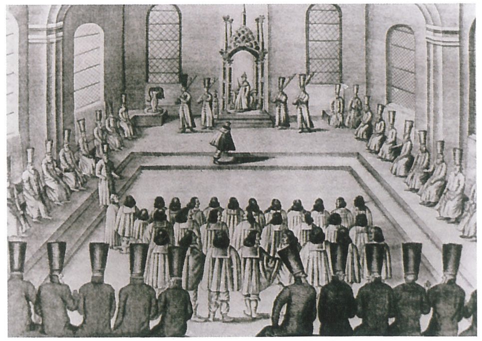


Plan of Moscow. Engraving by Georg Braun and Franz Hohenberg. c 1575

Belarusians who had been taken captive or compelled to resettle were found accommodation in the Meshchanskaia Quarter (the district where the poor of the city dwelled) of Moscow. A register of the time records that among them were specialists in 52 different crafts, many of which had been previously unknown in Moscow. For example, the Belarusians made use of more advanced techniques in the production of weapons and jewellery.

Modern Russian researchers are surprised that, in contrast with the almost totally illiterate Moscow of the 1670s, some 36% of those who attended the citizens' meetings of the Meshchanskaia Quarter were able to sign their own names; the overall literacy level was close to 50%.

Ambassadors are received at the court of Aleksei Mikhailovich in Moscow. Drawing after an engraving of the time





Page from Simiaon's verse collection the *Garden of many flowers*. 1676–1680

Simiaon of Polacak – writer and pedagogue. Engraving of the second half of the 19th century



Simiaon of Polacak

The most well-known of the Belarusians who came to settle in Russia was Simiaon of Polacak (Simeon Polotskii), an outstanding educator, writer and public figure. His real name was Samojla Piatroŭski-Sitnianovič.

He began his studies at the Fraternity School of the Monastery of the Epiphany in Polacak and continued them at the Kyiv Mohyla Academy. The thirst for knowledge brought young Samojla to the Vilnia Academy. By that time he had already mastered three languages in addition to his native Belarusian – Latin, Church Slavonic and Polish. He had such a good command of these languages that he was already composing verses in all four of them.

The war between the Commonwealth and Muscovy prevented him from completing his studies. He left Vilnia, plundered and laid waste by the Tsar's armies, to return to Polacak. There he entered the Monastery of the Epiphany, taking the monastic name Simiaon. He seized the opportunity to display his literary talent to the Tsar when Aleksei Mikhailovich came on a visit to Belarus. The poet was looking out for a patron who would protect him in those troubled times and thereby allow him to serve his muse in peace.

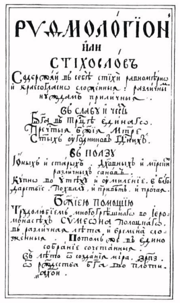
Many of Simiaon's verse eulogies were ironic, indeed riskily so. The Bishop of Polacak, Kalist, a Moscow placeman appointed to the post in defiance of canon law, repaid Simiaon for one of his verses by having him put to work in the monastery cow-byre (a shameful punishment) and then ordered him to be locked up in chains. It may well have been this incident that spurred the poet on to leave for Moscow in the spring of 1664.

Simiaon of Polacak was the first professional writer in Russia.

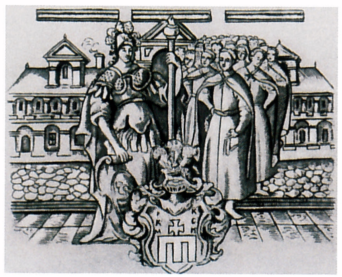


The verses in Simiaon's *Garden of many flowers* are presented in alphabetical order. The book was a kind of encyclopaedia of its time

Title page of Simiaon's manuscript *Rifmologion*



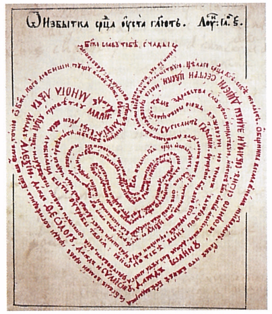
Simiaon drafted a project for the first university in Russia. It eventually served as the model for the Slavonic-Greek-Latin Academy in Moscow.



Students of the Kyiv Mohyla Academy where Simiaon studied. Engraving of the time



Simiaon's verse translation of the Psalms brought him great fame. Engravings by Simon Ushakov. Moscow. 1680



Simiaon's poetical experiments

At his death Simiaon left the richest library in Moscow. It contained the works of Cicero, St Thomas Aquinas, Erasmus of Rotterdam, the Church Fathers, dictionaries, herbaria, *etc*.

Simiaon was appointed governor and tutor to the Tsar's children. He personally instructed the heirs to the throne, the Tsareviches Aleksei and Fedor, the Tsarevna Sofia, and also guided the Tsar's youngest son, Petr, in his early years. Simiaon established his own printing shop, entirely free of Patriarchal censorship. The significance of this event can be measured by the fact that at a stroke the number of printing shops in Russia was doubled, from one to two. By contrast, some 134 printing shops were active at the time in the Commonwealth.

Simiaon's verse translation of the Psalms brought him great renown. He collected most of his poetry in the books *Rifmologion or Stikhoslov* and the *Garden of many flowers*. The latter was a kind of encyclopaedia in which the reader could find information on history, geography and zoology.

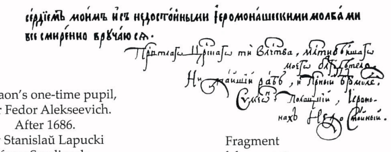
The Orthodox Church placed an anathema on Simiaon's writings and forbade all mention of them because of their heresy. It took a long time for his contribution to Russian culture to be truly appreciated.



Page from the *Story of Varlaam and Joseph*. Moscow. 1680



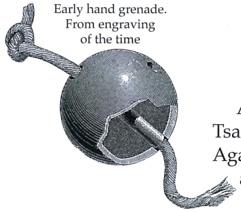
Simiaon's one-time pupil, Tsar Fedor Alekseevich. After 1686. By Stanislaŭ Lapucki from Smaliensk. In painting the portrait he was assisted by two more artists of Belarusian origin, Jerafiej Jalina and Luka Smaljaninaŭ



Fragment of document in Simiaon's own hand

Russia stood aside from the periods of the Renaissance and the Reformation that spread throughout Europe. At the time Belarus was more advanced, and the people resettled from there aided the development of literacy, crafts, science, medicine, and philosophical and social thought in the neighbouring state.

THE GREAT NORTHERN WAR



Early hand grenade. From engraving of the time

At the beginning of the 18th century Belarus once again became a theatre of war. Tsar Petr I of Russia was attempting to 'hack a door to Europe wide', as Pushkin put it. Against him stood King Charles XII of Sweden. The Grand Duke of Lithuania and King of Poland, Aŭhust II the Strong (Augustus II, August II), was Petr's ally but a number of Belarusian magnates led by the Sapieha and Pac clans supported the Swedes and elected Stanislaŭ Liaščynski (Stanisław Leszczyński) as Grand Duke and King. Civil war broke out in the Commonwealth.

Before the Battle of Poltava the Great Northen War was fought mainly on the territory of what is now Belarus.



Aŭhust II the Strong, Grand Duke of Lithuania and King of Poland, an ally of Russia in the Great Northern War. Painting by an unknown artist of the early 18th century



Petr I. Early 18th-century engraving



Stanislaŭ Liaščynski, Grand Duke of Lithuania and King of Poland. Engraving by Johann Stenglin after a painting by Daniel Klein. Mid-18th century



The grenade launcher was a fearsome weapon, but a mistake in firing would often prove fatal for the soldier using it



Nobleman and captain of horse. Late 17th-century engraving

CHRONOLOGY

1700–1721 – Great Northern War fought by Russia and the Commonwealth against Sweden
8 September 1708 – destruction of Mahilioŭ
9 October 1708 – Battle of Liasnaja

A Russian army of 70,000 men was already active in Belarus, with the soldiers and officers behaving more like invaders than allies. Petr I made no attempt to restrain his subjects. Quite the reverse, in fact: he actively encouraged the harsh treatment of the Belarusian people by his own example.

The oldest church in Belarus – the Cathedral of St Sophia in Polacak – was sealed and turned into a military storehouse where ammunition and horses were kept. Gunpowder supplies were stored beneath the building. It would take just one spark to blow the whole place sky-high. This is precisely what happened on 1 May 1710. On the day before the Russians left Polacak a tremendous explosion reduced the cathedral to rubble.

Hundreds of other Belarusian towns and villages also suffered at the hands of the 'allies'. In the winter of 1707 the Russian cavalry plundered the Uniate Convent of the Holy Trinity in Miensk. Next it was the turn of the Church of the Holy Spirit in the Upper Market and of other churches and monasteries. Orthodox churches and monasteries were not spared. The Russians were followed by the Cossack and Kalmyk cavalry. The Miensk Orthodox Fraternity called upon the citizens to take up arms and on the river Niamiha the marauders were sharply rebuffed.

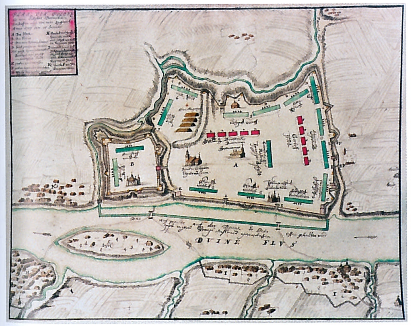


Belarusian nobleman in the times of the Great Northern War. 19th-century engraving



Count Ihnat Zaviša, Marshal of the Court of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, fought in the Great Northern War. By an unknown artist. 1732

In July 1705 the Russian Tsar Petr I, Prince Aleksandr Menshikov and several officers were involved in the murder of five Uniate priests in the Cathedral of St Sophia in Polacak.



Map of Polacak. 1707. Now in the Library of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg



Soldiers of the *strel'tsy* (riflemen) regiment. Illustration taken from map of Muscovy by Willem Blaeu. Amsterdam. 1635



This is how the Cathedral of St Sophia in Polacak looks today. In 1710 it was blown up by soldiers of Petr I

Mahilioŭ.
Early 18th-century
engraving



Prince Aleksandr Menshikov,
the closest associate of Petr I.
He had Belarusian roots.
Engraving of the first half of the 18th century



Mahilioŭ, one of the wealthiest cities of Belarus, suffered badly in the Northern War. First Aleksandr Menshikov's troops devastated it, then the Swedes robbed and tortured the inhabitants. After the Swedish troops had left, the Russian commander – for no obvious military reason – ordered what was left to be burned to the ground. Viciebsk, Horadnia, Niaśviž, Kliecak and Liachavičy all met with a similar fate.

The weakened Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth came increasingly to resemble an appendage of the Russian Empire rather than an ally. Petr I succeeded in obtaining a reduction in the size of the Commonwealth's army. It was not to exceed 24,000 men: 18,000 in Poland and 6,000 in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. At the same time the armies of the Commonwealth's immediate neighbours were much larger: Russian forces were 350,000 strong, the Austrian army had 280,000 men and Prussia could muster 200,000 troops.



Battle of Liasnaja.
Illuminated engraving
after a painting
by Pierre-Denis
Martin le Jeune. 1720s



Fragment
of nobleman's belt.
First half
of the 18th century.
Silver, embossed, engraved



Memorial chapel
near Liasnaja,
Slaŭharad
district

In July 1708 the Swedish King defeated the Tsar's army at the small town of Haloŭčyn near Bialyničy. However, in October of that same year the Russians annihilated the Swedish corps of Adam Lewenhaupt in the Battle of Liasnaja near Prapojsk. Lewenhaupt's men had been moving southwards towards Ukraine to join up with the main army of Charles XII. Only 5,000 of them reached the Swedish King. The other 9,000 stayed for ever where they fell on the battlefield. Petr I had every reason to call this battle the 'mother of the victory at Poltava'.

The war dragged on after the Battle of Poltava, but the Russians clearly had the upper hand. Belarus lost one in every three of its population in the Great Northern War, 700,000 people in all. In the Škloŭ county only 10% of the original number of inhabitants were left. Fields overgrown with bushes and trees, abandoned villages and estates – this was the typical picture of Belarus at the time.

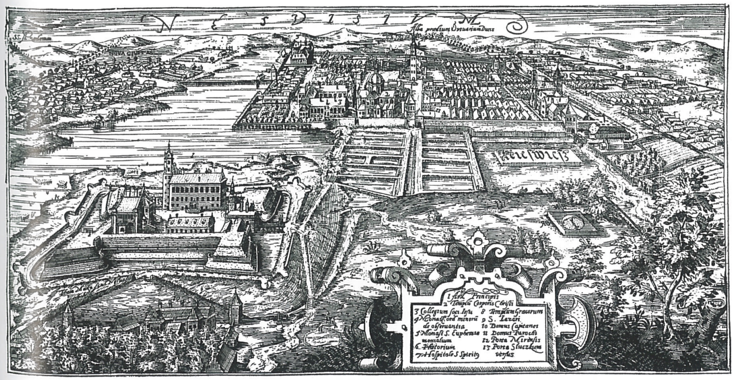
After the war the frontiers of the Commonwealth remained unchanged but the country had all but lost its sovereignty.



Hazdava coat of arms
used by the Pac family,
who were allies of the Swedes
in the Great Northern War

Hussar breastplate.
Early 18th century





View of Niaśviž
before the town was destroyed
in the Great Northern War.
Engraving by Tamaš Makoŭski.
c 1600

THE FINAL YEARS OF THE COMMONWEALTH



Coat of arms of the Commonwealth under Aŭhust III (Augustus III, August III). Carved wood

The Diet was paralysed by the nobility's right of *liberum veto*. The veto meant that a resolution could not be passed if even one single deputy voted against it.

Anarchy triggered by the nobility

Utterly exhausted by endless war, the Commonwealth was in urgent need of reform if it was to survive politically, militarily and economically. However, reforms required a strong central authority, which is exactly what the state lacked. The nobility had no desire to part with even the tiniest fraction of their 'golden' liberties, and so their ability to do as they pleased turned into complete anarchy.

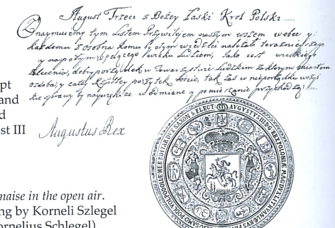
Four out of every five national Diets broke up in disarray in the years 1652–1764. The same thing happened in the county dietines. The Commonwealth was in essence transformed from a confederation of two states into a confederation of separate counties where the great landholding families held sway. It was very much in the interests of the neighbouring countries to preserve this state of affairs. The 1764 Treaty of alliance between Russia and Prussia contained a secret clause obliging both parties to support the freedoms of the nobility and the *liberum veto* in the Commonwealth.



Grand Duke and King Aŭhust III spent most of his 30-year reign in his native Saxony. His contradictory and short-sighted policies turned the Commonwealth into a 'roadside coaching inn' for the armies of neighbouring states. Painting by Anton Raphael Mengs. 1745



Arras (hand-woven tapestry) with the *Pahonia* and White Eagle, from the Royal Castle on Wawel Hill, Kraków



Rescript signed and sealed by Aŭhust III



Polonaise in the open air. Painting by Korneli Szlegel (Cornelius Schlegel). Late 18th century

CHRONOLOGY

- 1767 – Slucak Confederation of nobility
- 1768 – formation of the patriotic Confederation of Bar
- 1772 – first partition of the Commonwealth and the annexation of the eastern part of Belarus to the Russian Empire
- 3 May 1791 – adoption by the Diet of the Commonwealth of the first constitution in Europe
- 1792 – formation of the Torhovytsia (Targowice) Confederation
- 1793 – second partition of the Commonwealth and annexation of central Belarus to the Russian Empire



Houses that belonged to Anton Tyzienhaŭz in Pastavy – an architectural ensemble of the second half of the 18th century. Photograph of the 1980s

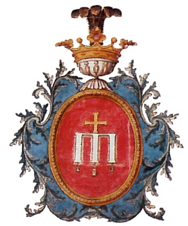
Nevertheless, there were real efforts being made in the 1760s to overcome the deep crisis in which the country found itself. Thanks to the efforts of Anton Tyzienhaŭz (Antoni Tyzenhauz), Treasurer of the Grand Duchy, a significant number of manufactories were established. A special educational commission was set up to improve the system of education in the country. The Diet of 1764 introduced restrictions on the use of the *liberum veto*. However, these first attempts at reform caused a storm of dissatisfaction among the magnates who wanted to rule as they had always done, with no limitations placed on their authority. The neighbouring countries were not slow to turn this situation to their advantage.



Anton Tyzienhaŭz, Treasurer of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, attempted to introduce liberal economic reforms. Portrait by Jan Rustem. 1819

Administrative and territorial divisions of Belarus and neighbouring territories in the mid-18th century





Radvan coat of arms, used by more than 150 noble clans in the Commonwealth (the Chmialieŭski, Dastajeŭski, Dubroŭski, Janovič, Judzicki, Maksimovič, Pačobut, Paškievič, Ščyt, Žarski, Žaŭryd and other families)



Cross of the Confederates of Bar, defenders of the Commonwealth's independence



Michal Kazimir Ahinski, Grand Hetman, who sided with the patriotic Confederation of Bar. Portait by Angelica Kaufmann. 1791



Gorget worn to distinguish members of the Confederation of Bar



Commonwealth orders with the coats of arms of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland



Medal struck in honour of Grand Hetman Michal Kazimir Ahinski by Johann Philip Holtzhaeusser. Copper. Obverse. Second half of the 18th century

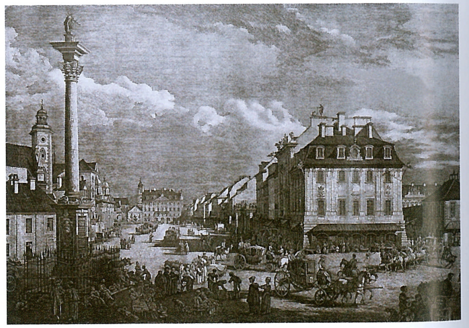
The first partition of the Commonwealth

In 1767 the Orthodox and Protestant nobility, with Russian support, met together in Slucak to form a 'confederation' (united armed force). The declared aim of the confederation was to achieve equality for the adherents of all religious confessions. Under the pretext of aiding the confederation Russia sent in an army of 40,000 men. The Diet was forced to grant the demands of non-Catholics and at the same time rescind the decree which restricted the use of the *liberum veto*.

On 5 August 1772 Russia, Austria and Prussia signed a convention formalising the first partition of the Commonwealth. The eastern part of Belarus, including the towns of Polacak, Viciebsk, Vorša, Mahilioŭ, Homieĺ and Rahačoŭ, now came under the authority of the Russian Empire.



Tadevuš Rejtan took part in the Confederation of Bar. He was elected to the Warsaw Diet in 1773 as one of the deputies for the Navahradak county. Together with the other deputy for Navahradak Samuel Korsak, and the deputy for Miensk Stanislaŭ Bahuševič Tadevuš Rejtan headed the opposition to the first partition of the Commonwealth. Engraving by James Hopwood after a drawing by Francišak Smuhlievič (Franciszek Smuglewicz). 1830s.



Warsaw. Late 18th-century engraving after a painting by Bernardo Bellotto



Hrušaŭka, the Rejtan family estate in the Miensk governorate. Lithograph after a drawing by Napalieon Orda. Mid-19th century



Miensk. Engraving of the 1770s



Catherine II. Lithograph after a portrait by Vigilius Erichsen. 1830s

The result was that the Catholic nobility rose up in rebellion and established a confederation of their own, at Bar in Ukraine. The Bar Confederates gained considerable support throughout the state, including Belarus. Grand Hetman Michal Kazimir Ahinski (Michał Kazimierz Ogiński) transferred his allegiance to them. However, the confederate troops were unable to defeat the Russian army, and were completely crushed in the period of 1768–1771. The Commonwealth now lay defenceless before its powerful neighbours.



Late 18th-century caricature of the partitions of the Commonwealth. The Russian Empress is pointing at Polacak with her right hand and tugging the Belarusian lands towards herself. By an unknown artist





Seal of Polacak with the city's coat of arms. 1791. Rubbing. After the first partition of the Commonwealth the frontier ran along the river Dźvina, dividing Polacak between the two countries

Map of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania after the first partition of the Commonwealth by Tobias Lotter. Augsburg. 1780

On 3 May 1791 the Commonwealth Diet approved the Constitution. This was the second written constitution in the world (the first was that of the United States) and the first in Europe.



Cialia coat of arms, used by the Paniatoŭski family



Silver medal struck in honour of the Constitution of 3 May 1791 by Johan-Georg Holtzey. Reverse

The Constitution of 1791

Only centralised authority and immediate reform could now save the state from certain ruin. An opportunity for this arose when the Four-Year Diet convened in 1788. The deputies affirmed the independence and sovereignty of the Commonwealth. The size of the army was increased to 100,000 men. Restrictions were imposed on the privileges of the nobility, whereas the rights of the townspeople were extended, *eg* they were now able to acquire landed estates. These were typical liberal reforms.

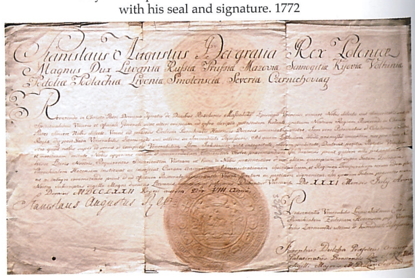
In accordance with the Constitution adopted by the Diet in 1791, a single government was formed to serve 'the whole of society, both the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania'. The Constitution proclaimed freedom of the press and of conscience, freedom of speech and the independence of the judiciary. Townspeople were guaranteed personal integrity. The state was to ensure religious tolerance.

Society at large welcomed the Constitution, which was intended to put the country firmly on the road of liberal reforms. 32 of the 34 dietines convened in the Commonwealth voted in favour of it, but it was too late. The fate of the country now rested in the hands of foreign rulers.

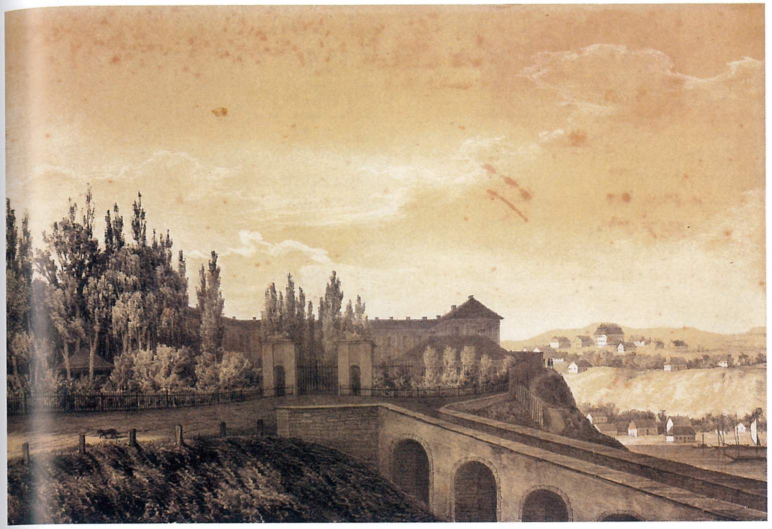


Last Grand Duke of Lithuania and King of Poland Stanislaŭ Aŭhust Paniatoŭski (Stanislaus Augustus Poniatowski, Stanisław August Poniatowski). By Juzaf Ksavier Hieski. 1783

Royal rescript of Stanislaŭ Aŭhust Paniatoŭski with his seal and signature. 1772



Stanislaus Augustus Dei gratia Rex Poloniae



Horadnia. It was here that in 1793 the last Commonwealth Diet met to ratify the second partition of the state. Russia did not attempt to conceal its readiness to use military force and so the deputies were left with no option but to sign the treaty. A large part of the Belarusian territory was annexed by the Russian Empire. Lithograph after a drawing by Napalieon Orda. Mid-19th century



Coat of arms of Horadnia. Impression of the official seal. 1792

There were 100,000 Russian soldiers on the territory of the Commonwealth, 30,000 of them in Belarus. The army of the Commonwealth was disbanded and all liberal reforms scrapped.

The second partition of the Commonwealth

All those dissatisfied by the revolutionary changes in the state, with Empress Catherine II of Russia as their patron, came together in a confederation at Torhovytsia (Targowice) in Ukraine. In May 1792 the confederates followed a Russian army of 100,000 men across the frontier into the Commonwealth.

The intervention resulted in the second partition of the country. The Russian Empire annexed the central Belarusian lands approximately along a line from Druja in the north to Pinsk in the south.

Protest was beginning to grow across the torn and trampled lands of the Commonwealth.



Church of the Uniate monastery of the Basilian Fathers in Baruny, built in the mid-18th century in the style of the Vilnia Baroque. Photograph of the 1980s



Slucak belts, an important element of attire for a nobleman. They are still regarded as outstanding examples of the work of Belarusian master craftsmen of the second half of the 18th century



Medal struck in honour of the educator and astronomer Marcin Pačobut-Adlianicki, director of the Vilnia Observatory. By Johann Philip Holzhaeusser. Silver. Obverse. 1775

SCIENCE AND CULTURE IN THE PERIOD FROM THE MID-17TH TO THE LATE 18TH CENTURIES

This was a period that witnessed significant changes in Belarusian culture. They were particularly striking in the field of education. The reform process that got under way in the Commonwealth included the establishment of what was effectively Europe's first-ever Ministry of Education, the Educational Commission. In the years 1773–1793 the Commission opened 20 schools in Navahradak, Pastavy, Pinsk, Mazyr, Babrujsk, Bieraście and other Belarusian towns. Pupils who completed their education there then had the opportunity to continue their studies in places of higher learning. There were two universities in the Commonwealth, in Kraków and Vilnia, but, just as before, hundreds of young Belarusian men chose to further their studies in the universities of Western Europe. The Medical College in Horadnia played an important part in the spreading of scientific knowledge.

At the beginning of the 1780s the Educational Commission opened 200 elementary schools in the part of Belarus that had not been annexed to the Russian Empire. 30% of the pupils were the children of peasants.



Michel Le Quien. Second half of the 18th century. The portrait comes from the picture gallery of the Polacak Academy



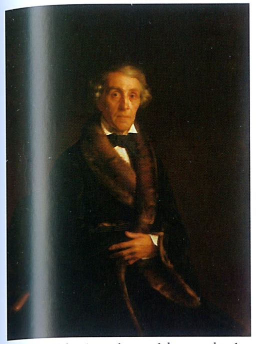
Diploma of Vilnia Academy. 1728



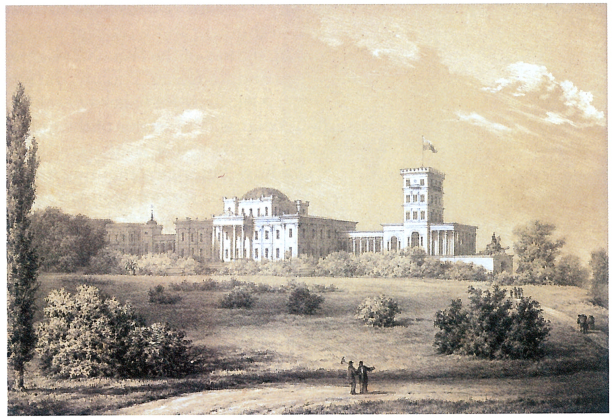
Early Belarusian printed books. 17th–18th centuries

CHRONOLOGY

c 1600 – after 1651 – life and work of Kazimir Siemianovič
1634–1689 – life and work of Kazimir Lyščynski
1651–1714 – life and work of Ilia Kapijevič
1728–1810 – life and work of Marcin Pačobut-Adlianicki

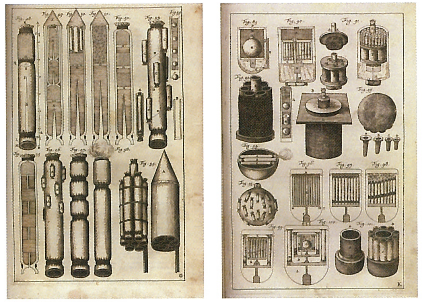


Fedor Tolstoi, graduate of the art school within the Polacak Jesuit College, famous Russian medallier and sculptor. Portrait by Siarhiej Zaranka (Sergei Zaryanko). 1850s



Homiel. The Rumyantsev – Paskevich Palace. Lithograph after a drawing by Napalieon Orda. Mid-19th century





Artis Magnae Artilleriae (The complete art of artillery) by Kazimir Siemianovič, published in Amsterdam in 1650, was reprinted in England, France, Germany, Denmark, Poland and other European countries

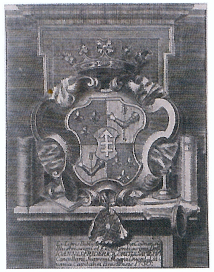
The Belarusian Kazimir Siemianovič invented the multi-stage rocket. Taken together with his other inventions in this area, there is every reason to regard Siemianovič as the precursor of Konstantin Tsiolkovskii, André Bing and Robert H. Goddard. His book *Artis Magnae Artilleriae* appeared in Amsterdam in 1650 and was translated into all the principal European languages.

The Rector of the College was the scientist Jean-Emmanuel Gilibert, author of a fundamental study of the flora of the Grand Duchy entitled *Flora Lithuanica*.

According to the Statutes of the Educational Commission teachers should strive to teach their pupils by encouraging them to think for themselves rather than learn by rote. Priority was given to the natural and social sciences rather than theology. The language of instruction was, however, Polish. (Belarusian had already lost its official status as a state language in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania back in 1696. In that year the Commonwealth Diet adopted a resolution which considerably restricted the areas in which Belarusian could be used.)



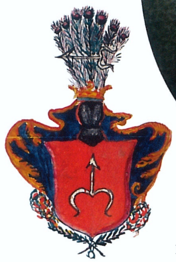
18th-century clock from the Rumyantsev – Paskevich Palace in Homiel



Ex libris bookplate
from the library
of Jan Fryderyk Sapieha.
Engraving by J. Milus.
1736

Belarusian thinkers and writers of the time were very much under the influence of the leading figures of the French Enlightenment such as Voltaire, Diderot, Montesquieu and Rousseau. Equally, the writings of Russian and Polish progressive thinkers like Aleksandr Radishchev, Stanisław Staszic and Hugo Kołłątaj were known throughout Belarus. The estates of the grand families of Belarus – Radzivil, Sapieha, Chraptovič, Ahinski and Tyzienhaŭz – became important centres of cultural life. They owned huge libraries containing thousands of volumes and invited renowned scholars to enter their service. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for example, accepted Anton Tyzienhaŭz's offer to settle in Belarus; it was by pure chance that he was eventually prevented from doing so.

Belarus gave Europe a large number of outstandingly talented figures. Among them was the philosopher Kazimir Lyščynski, a nobleman from Bieraście, who has been dubbed the Belarusian Giordano Bruno. He was tried and executed in 1689 for atheism on the basis of his treatise *De non existentia Dei* (On the non-existence of God).



Adravuž,
the Chraptovič
family coat
of arms



Jaŭchim Ihnat Jazep Litavor Chraptovič,
founder and member of the Educational
Commission, Chancellor
of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.
Miniature on enamel by Józef Kosiński. 1798



The Chraptovič family library in Ščorsy near Navahradak.
Engraving after a drawing by Napalieon Orda.
Second half of the 19th century



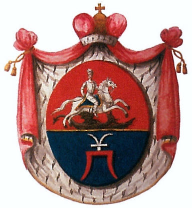
It was in the Calvinist school in Slucak that another outstanding figure of the Enlightenment, the translator Halliaš (Illia) Kapijevič, began his education. He went on to become a successful book publisher in Amsterdam. The first textbooks of arithmetic, grammar, rhetoric, astronomy and seamanship in Russian were published thanks to his efforts. It was he who devised the 'civil script' variant of the Cyrillic alphabet that was approved for use by Petr I in 1708. These are the shapes of letters used by the nations who today have alphabets based on Cyrillic.

Vaulted ceiling
of the Church of Corpus Christi in Niasviž.
Painted by Ksavier Daminik Hieski. 1763



Marcin Pačobut-Adlianicki, Rector of the Vilnia Academy,
Director of the Vilnia Astronomical Observatory.
He discovered a new constellation and fixed the precise geographical
co-ordinates of Vilnia, Horadnia and other Belarusian cities.
In recognition of his scientific achievements he was elected
a corresponding member of the *Académie des Sciences* in Paris.
Portrait by Jazep Aliaškievič. Early 19th century

The name of the scholar and scientist Marcin Pačobut-Adlianicki (Poczobutt-Odlanicki), a nobleman from Horadnia, was well-known throughout Europe. He played an active role in the work of the Educational Commission. He was the founder and director of the Vilnia astronomical observatory and served as Rector of what was the highest educational institution of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (formerly the Vilnia Academy).



Ahiniec, the Ahinski family
coat of arms



Portrait of Grand Hetman Michal Kazimir Ahinski,
composer, poet and patron of the arts.
By an unknown artist of the 18th century



Ceremonial dress
of a cavalier of the Order
of St Stanislaus
with a Slucak belt



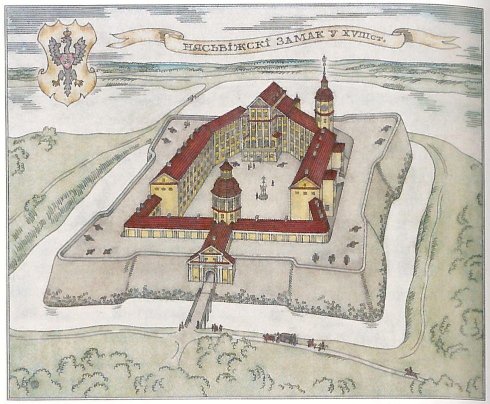
Royal Doors from
St George's Church
in Davyd-Haradok.
Mid-18th century



Goblet from the Naliboki glass
factory, which belonged
to the Radzivil family.
The factory produced more
than 100 types of artistic
glassware



Cathedral of St Sophia in Polacak, rebuilt in 1738–1750 by Johann Glaubitz in the Vilnia Baroque style. View from the apse. Photograph by Ernst Cieciareŭski



Niaśviž Castle in the 18th century. Artist's impression by Jaŭhien Kulik

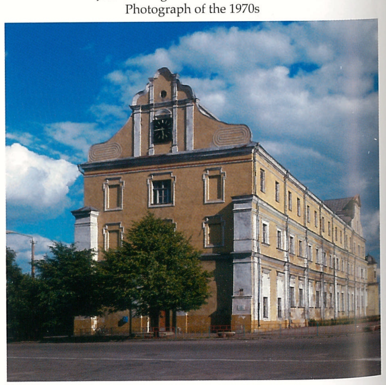
Trinity Church in Hlybokaje is still one of the landmarks that dominate the town. Second half of the 18th century





Slucak Gate in Niaśviž – an example of Baroque architecture of the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Photograph of the 1980s

Jesuit College in Pinsk. 1651–1675. Photograph of the 1970s





18th–19th-century Orthodox Church of St Michael the Archangel in Slucak, built of wood in the folk architectural tradition but with elements of the Baroque and classical styles

There were also significant achievements in architecture and art at the time. The architects Johann Christoph Glaubitz, Giuseppe Sacco and Carlo Spampani were among those in Belarus who produced designs for the building and restoration of park and palace complexes in Horadnia, Slonim, Ružany, Ščorsy and Dziarečyn.

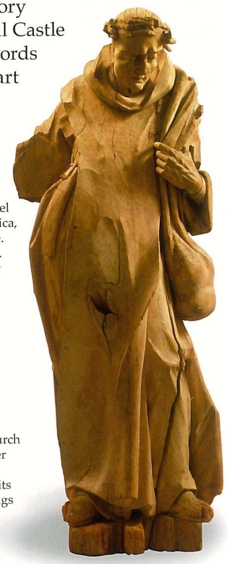
One of the best examples of the Baroque style in Belarus – the Jesuit Church of St Francis Xavier in Horadnia. Late 17th century. Photograph of the 1980s





High altar of the Church of St Francis Xavier in Horadnia, much admired for its unique woodcarvings and sculptures. 1737–1760

The magnates' residences were adorned with magnificent tapestries and portraits. A 1770 inventory of the Radzivil Castle in Niaśviž records 984 works of art on canvas and in wood.



St Felix from a chapel in Vialikaja Bierastavica, Horadnia province. Wood, carved, gilt. Early 18th century



Aliaksandr Tarasievič. *The Nativity.*
Engraving from *Rosarium et Officium B. Mariae Virginis...*
Printing shop of the Vilnia Academy. 1680



Vasil Vaščanka.
Engraving for the title page of the book *The New Heaven.*
Mahilioŭ. 1699



Vasil Vaščanka.
Title page of the *Book of saints' vitae.*
Mahilioŭ. 1702



Portrait of Maryjana, wife of Adam Chmara, palatine of Miensk.
By an unknown artist. 1763.



Portrait of a man
by an unknown artist of the 18th century.
From the Radzivil collection in Niaśviž



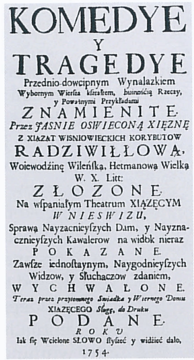
Francišak Smuhlievič. *The Prozar family.* 1789



Aliaksandr Tarasievič.
Portrait of Kazimir Klakocki, standard bearer of Miensk.
Engraving on copper.
Slucak. 1685



Princess Franciška Uršulia Radzivil has gone down in history as the founder of the theatre in Niaśviž and the author of numerous plays that were staged there.
Engraving by Hierška Liajbovič. Mid-18th century



KOMEDYE
Y
TRAGEDYE
Przednio-dowcipnym Wynalazkiem
Wybornym Wiersza kształtem, bujnością Rzeczy,
y Poważnymi Przykładami
ZNAMIENITE.
Przez JASNIE OSWIECONĄ XIĘZNĘ
Z XIĄZĄT WISNIOWIECKICH KORYBUTOW
RADZIWIŁŁOWĄ,
Woiewodżinę Wileńską, Hetmanową Wielką
W. X. Litt:
ZŁOZONE.
Na wspaniałym Theatrum XIĄZĘCYM
W NIESWIZU,
Sprawą Nayzacnieyszych Dam, y Nayznacznieyszych Kawalerow na widok nieraz
POKAZANE.
Zawsze iednostaynym, Naygodnieyszych Widzow, y Słuchaczow zdaniem,
WYCHWAŁONE.
Teraz przez przytomnego Swiadka y Wiernego Domu
XIĄZĘCEGO *Sługę, do Druku*
PODANE.
ROKU
Iak się Wcielone SŁOWO słyszeć y widzieć dało,
1754.

Franciška Uršulia Radzivil's book *Komedye y tragedye* (Comedies and tragedies).
1754



Fragment of wall tapestry
The Battle at Mazyr.
Woven by Maryja Kulakoŭskaja at the factory in Kareličy.
Second half of the 18th century



Outstanding example of a Slucak belt from Belarus woven from gilt silk thread.
Second half of the 18th century

Private theatres were a prominent feature of Belarusian cultural life at the time. The most well-known theatres in Belarus and way beyond its borders were those of the Radzivil family in Niaśviž and Slucak, the Tyzienhaŭz family in Horadnia and the Ahinski family in Slonim.

The Belarusian magnates also invited leading theatrical professionals from Western Europe to work on their estates. However, the actors and musicians were always drawn from among the local peasants and townsfolk.
The Horadnia ballet and dancers from Slonim formed the basis of the Warsaw Royal Ballet Company. The plays of Molière, comedies by Voltaire and dramatic works by Princess Franciška Uršulia Radzivil (Franciszka Urszula Radziwiłłowa) were staged in private theatres.

In contrast to the state of decay in the economic and political life of the Commonwealth, this was a time when the country's cultural life flourished. Belarus felt the beneficial influence of the European Age of the Enlightenment.

THE INSURRECTION OF 1794 AND TADEVUŠ KAŚCIUŠKA



Buckle of the time for a sabre
with the portrait of Kaściuška

The aims of the uprising that erupted in 1794 were quite clear: the complete independence of the Commonwealth, its restoration within the frontiers of 1772 and the return of the Constitution of 3 May 1791. At the head of the uprising was Tadevuš Kaściuška (Andrzej Tadeusz Bonawentura Kościuszko).

Born on the farmstead of Maračoŭščyna near Kosava (now in the Ivacevičy district), he came from an old family of Belarusian nobility. After periods of study in the Warsaw Corps of Cadets and Paris Military School, Kaściuška volunteered to fight on the republican side for the independence of the United States. He eventually attained the rank of general and, after winning a series of victories thanks to his skill as a military engineer, became an American national hero. (Statues have been erected in his honour in many cities of the USA, including Washington, Chicago and Cleveland. In the state of Mississippi there is a town named after him.)



Estate at Maračoŭščyna near Kosava
(now in the Ivacevičy district) where Tadevuš Kaściuška was born.
Lithograph after a drawing by Napalieon Orda.
Mid-19th century

The insurgents on the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were led by the 30-year-old Jakub Jasinski, one of the so-called 'Vilnia Jacobins'. Hewas a fervent supporter of the French Revolution, wanted to abolish serfdom and wrote versified proclamations in Belarusian.



Weapons used by the insurgent 'scythemen'
and the banner presented to them
by Tadevuš Kaściuška during the defence
of Warsaw against the Russian army.
Museum of the Polish Army in Warsaw

Tadevuš Kaściuška in the victorious Battle of Racławice.
Picture by Juliusz Kossak. 1879



CHRONOLOGY

1746–1817 – life of Tadevuš Kaściuška

1794 – national liberation insurrection led by Tadevuš Kaściuška

October 1795 – third partition of the Commonwealth.
Western part of Belarus is annexed to the Russian Empire

Tadevuš Kaściuška eventually returned home and joined the fight against the Torhovytsia Confederation. Once the uprising started he was proclaimed leader and commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

In Poland the insurrection flared up on 24 March; Belarus took up arms in April. It was here that a provisional revolutionary government was set up – the Supreme Council of Lithuania.

The patriotically-minded nobility, townspeople and clergy were joined by peasants armed with scythes: all took an active part in the uprising. Their battle hymn was the *Song of the Belarusian soldiers*:

We well remember what they did to us.
How they flayed us alive and beat us.
For how long must we stay silent?
Enough of sitting at home!
Why did they take our land away?
Why did they clamp us in irons?
They raped our wives and daughters,
Time now to pay them back!
Traitors are already in the Senate,
Should we then sit and rot at home?
We'll take our scythes and our muskets,
We'll bend their proud necks,
They've been riding our horses,
They took what they wanted,
Let's go off to join Kaściuška
And kill the Moscow scum!



Andrej Tadevuš Banavientura Kaściuška, national hero of Belarus,
Poland and the United States, honorary citizen of France.
Engraving by James Hopwood after a portrait by Josef Grassi.
First half of the 19th century



The nobility were always the main force behind the uprisings for national liberation on the lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania that had been seized by Russia. This is the coat of arms *Roch III* used by the Kaściuška family



Virtuti Militari order,
instituted by the last King
of the Commonwealth,
Stanislaŭ Auhust Paniatoŭski

At first the Belarusian peasants helped the insurgents, believing the promises of the Supreme Council of Lithuania that serfdom would be abolished.



Insurgents of 1794.
(left: officer,
right: bombardier)
Design for uniforms.
Drawing by Jasep Harasimovič



Tadevuš Kaściuška takes the oath
on the Market Place in Kraków on 24 March 1794.
Painting by Michał Stachowicz.
Early 19th century



Stafan Hraboŭski, one of the leaders of the 1794 insurrection, born near Navahradak. Drawing by an unknown artist. 1801



Insurgent army camp. Spring 1794. By Michał Stachowicz. Early 19th century

The insurgents seized power in Vilnia, Horadnia, Bieraście, Navahradak, Slonim, Pinsk, Vaŭkavysk, Kobryń, Ašmiana, Lida and Braslaŭ.



Seal of the Supreme Council of Lithuania, the provisional insurgent government of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania



Colonel Jakub Jasinski, head of the insurrection in Belarus. By an unknown artist. 1790s

The sides were unequally matched, and besides, the insurgent authorities did nothing for the liberation of the serfs. Michal Klieafas Ahinski, the composer of the *March of the insurgents of 1794* as well as the famous polonaise *Farewell to the homeland* attempted to break through to the area around Miensk with 3,000 men, but in June his troops were utterly defeated. The insurgents led by Stafan Hraboŭski managed to push further ahead but were forced to surrender in September in a battle near Liubań.



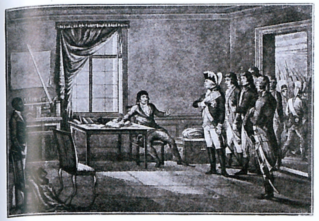
Michal Klieafas Ahinski, one of the participants in the insurrection, Commonwealth statesman, composer and diplomat. Lithograph after a portrait by François Grenier. Mid-19th century



Plan of the battle at Maciejowice on 10 October 1794, where Tadevuš Kaściuška was badly wounded and captured. Drawing by Michał Stachowicz



'Scythemen' enlisted in 1794 from among the peasantry. Watercolour by Michał Stachowicz. Early 19th century





Russian Emperor Paul I visiting Kaściuška in prison (left)

Paul I returns Kaściuška his sabre (right)

Drawings of the time by Thomas Gaugain

The insurrection drowned in blood in November 1794. The third partition of the Commonwealth took place a year later.



Skirmish between insurgent cavalry and Russian infantry. By Aleksander Orłowski. 1794



Medal struck in honour of Tadevuš Kaściuška by August Cannois. Copper. Obverse. 1818

Various opinions were beginning to surface in the insurgent camp. Kaściuška was afraid to rely on the common people. He was alarmed by Jakub Jasinski's revolutionary programme and his intention to restore the complete independence of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The tsarist authorities were simultaneously pursuing a cunning propaganda campaign among the Belarusian peasantry by promising them land confiscated from the 'rebellious lords'. The Supreme Council of Lithuania was accused of separatism and actions against 'the union of the two fraternal nations', and was disbanded. Jasinski was removed from his post as head of the insurgent forces in the Grand Duchy. This weakened the insurgents still further and in August the Russian army took Vilnia.

The troops of Aleksandr Suvorov, hardened in numerous aggressive campaigns, crushed the uprising with exceptional cruelty. For the bloodthirsty deeds committed by his men Empress Catherine II granted Suvorov the whole of the Kobryń county and other land in Belarus, together with 13,279 peasant serfs.



Rank-and-file soldier of the insurgent army. 1794

Austria and Prussia seized the Polish lands of the Commonwealth and also annexed part of the Ukrainian lands and what is now *Lietuva*. Russia took for itself what was left of Belarus and Ukraine, as well as the remainder of the territory that now belongs to *Lietuva*. The last King of the Commonwealth, Stanislaŭ Aŭhust Paniatoŭski (Stanislaus Augustus Poniatowski, Stanisław II August Poniatowski), became a prisoner. The Commonwealth itself was historically dead.



Memorial stone *To the shades of Kościuszko* on the former Ahinski family estate in Zalieśsie, Smarhoń district

BELARUS IN THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE



Ten-rouble tsarist assignat (banknote). 1821

The old dream of the Russian tsars finally came true after the three partitions of the Commonwealth: Belarus became part of the Russian Empire. Marx and Engels aptly described Russia as the 'Gendarme of Europe'. Lenin referred to it as the 'prison of nations'.

The overwhelming majority of the nobility and magnates of the Commonwealth took the oath of allegiance to the Russian throne and so managed to keep their estates and their privileges.

Catherine II and her son Emperor Paul I presented 208,500 'souls of the male sex' (*ie* serfs) in the Belarusian governorates to their own nobility. In that way nearly half a million Belarusians, who until then for the most part had been freemen, found themselves enslaved to Russian landowners.

The feudal economy in Russia was characterised by its primitive nature. The conditions of serfdom were much harsher by comparison with those that had existed in the Commonwealth.

Corvée labour was now imposed on the rural population of Belarus, where previously they had paid quit-rent in cash. It became common practice for the landowners to transfer thousands of their serfs to building works in distant provinces of the empire.



Belarusian architectural monuments were left to go to wrack and ruin in the Russian Empire. This church of the Dominican Order in Ziembin (now in the Barysaŭ district) was closed in 1833. Photograph by Aliaksiej Jaromienka



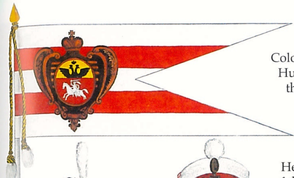
Nobleman's estate in the village of Čyrvony Bierah (Red Bank, now in the Žlobin district). Photograph of the 1990s



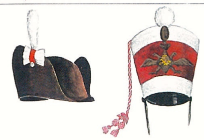
Coat of arms of Šarašoŭ (Pružany district). These old emblems, just like the freedoms granted by the Magdeburg Law, became a distant memory after the seizure of Belarus

Belarusian towns were deprived of their coats of arms and the Magdeburg Law was abolished.

This harsh exploitation reduced the rural population of Belarus to a state of abject poverty. The governor of Viciebsk, in his report for the years 1807–1809, states that very few peasants eat pure bread, whereas most of them 'always add chaff'. This was the way Catherine II carried out her promise to ensure that the peoples recently joined to the empire 'should share in the bliss, greatness and manifold abundance' of the state.



Colours of the Belarusian Hussar Regiment from the years 1776–1783



Headgear of a colonel of the Belarusian Hussar Regiment (left) and a shako worn by the lower ranks of the Horadnia Hussar Regiment of Life Guards. 1824–1825



Shield with the 'united coats of arms of the Belarusian principalities', *ie* those of Polacak, Viciebsk and Amścisłaŭ. 1857



Shield with the 'united coats of arms of the principalities and regions of North-Western Russia', *ie* the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Samogitia and the Bielastok province. 1857

The Belarusians became cannon fodder for Russia's rapacious military campaigns. Belarus provided 14,750 recruits for the Russian army in 1811 alone.

The gentry who were unable to provide documentary evidence of their rights were reduced to the status of tax-paying citizens. In the Belarusian governorates, by contrast to those of Russia, until 1811 taxes were collected in coin rather than assignats. According to the unofficial exchange rate 100 paper roubles were the equivalent of 22 roubles in silver.

The armed forces of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania had been disbanded by the new authorities. In their stead came a hitherto unknown system of recruitment. Young healthy males between the ages of 19 and 35 were taken off as recruits. In peacetime the authorities in St Petersburg demanded one soldier for every 500 'souls'. In time of war the number was increased to four, five or even eight. The relatives of the recruits saw them off the way mourners bid farewell to their loved ones.

Recruits served for the rest of their lives until 1793, when military service was reduced to 'only' to 25 years. It was not until 1834 that the period of service was cut to 20 years.

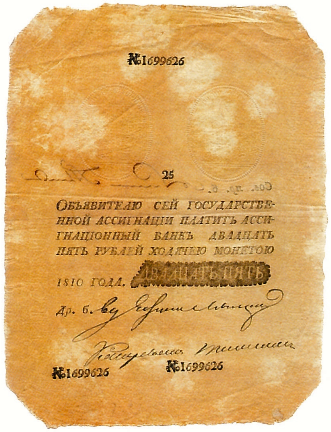


Rank-and-file troopers of the Belarusian Hussar Regiment. 1809–1811. Lithograph of the late 19th century



Former coat of arms of Lipniški in the Ašmiana county

25-rouble assignat. 1810



Carafe and flute glasses. Nalibaki glass factory





Kotvič coat of arms (the Čaplicki, Halicki, Hilieŭski, Hilievič, Kaliačycki, Liankievič, Smolič, Strupinski and Taŭkač families). The nobility of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania were not Polish. Even though they mostly wrote in Polish, they were of local origin and had never seized the land on which they lived. On the contrary, they defended it from enemies and rose in rebellion against occupiers. They knew the Belarusian language well and were familiar with the folklore and traditions of the people



Jason Junaša-Smaharžeŭski (Jason Junosza-Smogorzewski), Uniate Archbishop of Polacak. 19th-century engraving



Icon of the Virgin and Child from the Franciscan Church of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Pinsk. By an unknown artist. 1630s

Russia knew nothing of national or religious tolerance. Belarusians were not regarded as a nation in their own right. Instead, they were viewed as Russians, a bit spoiled by Polish influence. The Belarusian language was treated in the same way. Belarusians were even deprived of their own names. Straightaway after the annexation of the eastern Belarusian lands the Russian clerks re-registered people called Jazep as Iosif, Michaś became Mikhail and Tamaš was turned into Foma. The surname Žuk became Zhukov, Kot mutated into Kotov and Kavaĺ was transformed into Kovalev.

Belarusians were deprived of the right to study in foreign universities, a right that they had previously enjoyed for several centuries.

The chronicles and archives of the most famous noble families were removed from the libraries of monasteries, churches and private collections in Belarus. They were transported to St Petersburg at the order of Catherine II 'for her own use in her historical writings'.

The tsarist authorities could not fail to keep a close watch on educational establishments. Some of them were placed under military supervision.

Attempts were made to ensure that students studying abroad returned to the Russian Empire. In all Belarusian schools and other places of learning the language of instruction in the few decades after annexation was Polish. It may seem strange but it was precisely then that the Polonisers achieved their greatest success. The government in St Petersburg thought it would make things easier if the whole population of the newly annexed lands were Poles.

On the other hand the speed of Russification was growing apace. Even the loyal Orthodox clergy were not trusted. Belarusian priests were transferred into the very depths of the Russian Empire and replaced by Russians, who knew neither the language nor local traditions. They carefully and suspiciously went over the lists of Belarusian saints, reducing them in rank. They fought mercilessly against the mumming traditions at Yuletide, against any celebration of Midsummer's Eve and all the other ancient customs.

Monastery at Žyrovičy near Slonim. For about two centuries it had been one of the centres of the Uniate Church in Belarus





Štof (bottle to contain one *štof* [approx. 1.23 litres] of vodka). Urečča factory. Engraved clear glass, carved and polished wood. Late 18th – early 19th centuries



Upper Market Square in Miensk with the town hall, demolished by the Russian authorities in order to erase the memory of self-government on the basis of the Magdeburg Law. Late 18th-century engraving by an unknown artist



Sulima coat of arms was used by some 40 noble clans (the Ankudovič, Daniloŭski, Hajeŭski, Harbatoŭski, Harboŭski, Lyčkoŭski, Samojla, Savič, Stravinski, Sulkoŭski, Zablocki and other families)

The governors reported to Emperor Paul I on how the faithful reacted to these Orthodox 'missionaries', 'The priests who have been sent here are incapable of fulfilling their duties and unable to maintain good relations with the people who live here. The people have come to loathe them.' A start was made on forcibly converting the Uniates, who made up 75% of the population of Belarus, to Orthodoxy.

In 1794 the Russian imperial authorities established a pale of settlement. Jews were not permitted to live outside it, and even inside they could live only in towns. Jewish townspeople, merchants and craftsmen were charged twice the amount of state tax that was levied from Christians.

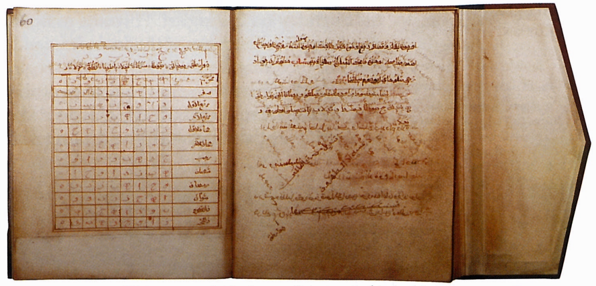
The colonial status of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania forced many patriots into exile abroad. Most of the general public were also unhappy with the new order.



Semen Zorich, a favourite of Empress Catherine II. In 1778 she made him a gift of the small town of Šklоŭ in Belarus. Late 18th-century engraving

Slucak belts have at various times been a source of inspiration for poets and composers





Kitab – manuscript books on religious and ethical subjects, written in Belarusian using the Arabic script. *Kitabs* were produced by Tatars who had been living in Belarus since the 14th century

Special restrictive laws were adopted for the Jewish community in Belarus.

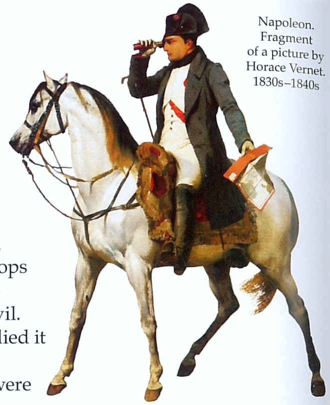


Jewish tavern near Vilnia. Lithograph after a drawing by Kanstancin Kukievič. 1848

THE WAR OF 1812



Officer's cap with peak. Such caps were widely used in European armies of the 19th century



Napoleon. Fragment of a picture by Horace Vernet. 1830s–1840s

Napoleon Bonaparte's half-a-million-strong army crossed the Russian frontier on 24 June. Just four days later people were already out on the streets of the former capital of the Grand Duchy greeting the French Emperor. Vil̦nia echoed with shouts of 'Glory to the Liberator!' The first troops to enter the city – under white-red-white banners – were the uhlan regiment of Prince Daminik Radzivil. He had himself established the regiment and supplied it out of his own pocket.

A few days later the troops of Marshal Davout were accorded a no less enthusiastic welcome in Miensk.

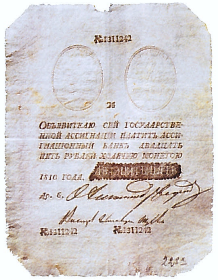
Three Russian armies – commanded by generals Mikhail Barclay de Tolly, Petr Bagration and Aleksandr Tormasov – stood against Napoleon on the territories of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania. They scored some local successes, but were unable to join together and do battle against the French on a grand scale, and so were forced to retreat into the depths of the country. At Kliaścicy near Polacak troops under the command of Marshal Oudinot were defeated by General Yakov Kul'nev, but even so the French held on to Polacak and Kul'nev was killed.

Napoleon, now Emperor of a territory stretching from Spain to Belarus, celebrated his birthday on 15 August. Portraits of Bonaparte bearing congratulatory messages were displayed in the towns of the former Grand Duchy. The newspapers wrote of 'the giant steps of the great Emperor's invincible regiments' and the large contributions being made in support of his forces. In the houses of the nobility toasts were proposed and '*Vivat*' was shouted, but somehow the glasses did not ring quite so joyfully as they had at the beginning of the campaign.

The war of 1812 in Belarus was markedly different from the war in Russia.

Don Cossacks under General Platov attack near Niaśviž in June 1812. Lithograph by Nikolai Bogatov. 1912





Sample of forged assignats issued by order of Napoleon on the occupied territory of the Russian Empire

Pouch and belt of grenadier in Napoleon's army



CHRONOLOGY

24 June 1812 – Napoleon's *Grande Armée* crosses the Nioman
1 July 1812 – provisional government of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is set up
1 August 1812 – Napoleon orders the creation of an army for the Grand Duchy of Lithuania
26–28 November 1812 – French army crosses the Biarezina



Battle of Kliaścicy near Polacak. Painting by Peter von Hess. Mid-19th century



Yakov Kul'nev, Cavalry Major-General, the hero of the Battle of Kliaścicy. By an unknown artist. 1810s



Coat of arms of Kobryń, where Napoleon suffered one of his earliest defeats

The provisional government of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was placed under the authority of French commissars. In exchange for his promise to restore the independence of the Grand Duchy Napoleon demanded a force of 100,000 men, and huge supplies of fodder for his horses and food for the army. The peasants gave up their hopes for the abolition of serfdom. For the patriots of the Grand Duchy Napoleon's campaign did not present an opportunity of restoring state sovereignty.

Exactly one month after taking Vil̦nia the Emperor entered Viciebsk. In spite of heavy losses and military failures at Kobryń, Mir and Polacak, he had covered several hundred miles from the frontier river, the Nioman, and acquired five million new subjects.

Just before the campaign started Napoleon had said to his commanders, 'I will finish the campaign in Smaliensk and Miensk. I will establish my headquarters in Vil̦nia this winter and from there start to bring order to Lithuania... I will not cross the river Dźvina. To advance any further this year is to invite certain destruction.'

The Belarusian lands were officially deemed 'freed from Russian oppression,' but the true situation scarcely resembled a genuine restoration of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Battle near Krasny in the Smaliensk Governorate. Painting by Peter von Hess. Mid-19th century





Sword with elaborate guard and pommel. Europe. 1807. Replica by the Belarusian armoury workshop *Końnia*

Just before the Battle of Borodino the 'Ruler of Europe' was forced to send a 10,000-strong force to the aid of the 12,000 men of the Viciebsk garrison who were in effect besieged by partisans.



Russian cuirass. Early 19th century



Helmet of junior officer in the Russian cavalry



Officers of the Harodnia Hussar Regiment. 1809–1811. Lithograph of the late 19th century

Who can tell how things would have turned out if Napoleon had really stopped at the Dźvina, if he had heeded his supporters in the Grand Duchy and had granted freedom to the peasants, as he had done in the Principality of Warsaw? However, it was in Viciebsk that he took the fatal decision to press on to Moscow. The strivings of nations for independence were of little concern to him; the maps in his headquarters already bore arrows pointing in the direction of India.

In August Napoleon signed another decree on the requisitioning of supplies. This time the five governorates were to supply the *Grande Armée* with 528,000 tons of wheat, 100,000 tons of oats and 53,000 head of cattle.

The peasants took up arms – their axes and scythes. The change in the Belarusians' attitude towards Napoleon had a bad effect on his plans. Aliaksandr Sapieha, a one-time enthusiastic Bonapartiste who had more than once been entrusted with intelligence missions by the Emperor in person, resigned from the provisional government.



Russian troops storm Polacak in October 1812. Painting by Peter von Hess. Mid-19th century



French army retreats through Vilnia. Lithograph by Jan Damiel. 1846



Juzaf Paniatoŭski (Józef Poniatowski), participant in the 1794 uprising. During Napoleon's campaign he commanded the V corps of the *Grande Armée*. Engraving by James Hopwood after a portrait by Antoni Brodowski. Early 19th century

The autumn retreat of the former *Grande Armée* from Moscow soon turned into a rout. In October and November the Russians retook Polacak, Viciebsk, Miensk, Mahilioŭ and Barysaŭ. The French managed to cross the Biarezina by the village of Studzionka near Barysaŭ, though they suffered heavy losses in the process, and retreated in disorder further west. In Smarhoń Napoleon changed into the uniform of a Polish uhlan and abandoned his troops.

Despite the fact that many peasants had fought against the French, the conditions of serfdom in Belarusian villages became much harsher after 1812.

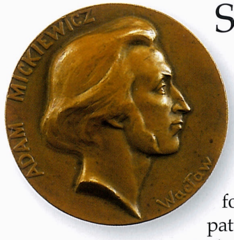
In exile on the isolated rocky island of St Helena in the middle of the South Atlantic, Bonaparte frequently turned his thoughts back to the land of Belarus. In his declining years he came to regard the mistakes, both political and military, he had made there as the reason for his defeat in 1812.

Napoleon's military adventure cost Belarus a million lives, one in every four of its inhabitants. Some were killed in action, others died of hunger and disease. 25,000 Belarusians served in the *Grande Armée*. Some of them were killed, others joined the retreat and saw military action in Europe, fighting on foreign soil for foreign interests.



Crossing the Biarezina. Painting by Peter von Hess. Mid-19th century. Napoleon managed to counterattack decisively and drive the forces of General Chichagov out of Barysaŭ, thus enabling his men to cross the Biarezina river. What was left of the *Grande Armée* now managed to retreat in the direction of Smarhoń and Vilnia

SECRET SOCIETIES



Jubilee medal struck to mark the Mickievič (Mickiewicz) centenary. By medallier Wacław Szymanowski. Obverse. 1898

The national liberation movement continued to live on in the Belarusian lands seized by Russia. Vilnia University was an ideal milieu in which ideas and yearnings for freedom could thrive. It was there that a group of students founded a secret patriotic society, the Philomaths (from the Greek *philomathēs*, 'seeker after knowledge'). The students were Tamaš Zan (Tomasz Zan), Jazep Jažoŭski (Józef Jeżowski), Adam Mickievič (Adam Mickiewicz), Anuprej Pietraškievič (Onufry Pietraszkiewicz) and Francišak Malieŭski (Franciszek Malewski).

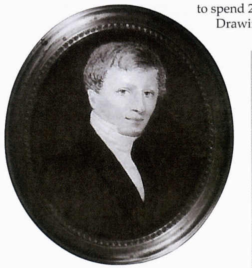
Initially the Philomaths' aims were purely cultural; they called for improvements in education. However, given the predominantly reactionary mood of the authorities at the time, the young members of this underground society were soon gripped by political ideas. The society's programme came to include demands for national independence and the abolition of serfdom.



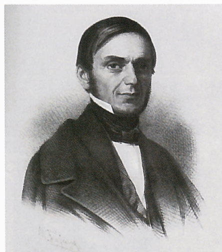
After his arrest Tamaš Zan was forced to spend 20 years away from his homeland. Drawing by an unknown artist. 1855

The Philomaths placed their hopes for the restoration of the Commonwealth on the 'middle class', by which they meant the nobility or gentry. The society founded two branches to propagate their views: *Pramianistyja* (the Radiant Association) and the Philaretes (from the Greek *philaretos*, 'lover of virtue'). Tamaš Zan was elected Chairman of the more radical association of Philaretes.

The Philomaths made a great contribution to the study of the history and culture of the Belarusian people. They collected songs, tales and legends, recorded customs and traditions, and organised meetings where they read their research papers on the topics as well as literary compositions of their own. Of special importance was the Philomath organisation in the Polacak grammar school run by the Piarist fathers. Lectures on world history were given there by the historian Jaŭchim Lialievieĺ (Joachim Lelewel). (It was he who coined the slogan aimed at Russian democrats 'For our freedom and yours!') Secret societies also existed in the secondary schools of Švislač and Viciebsk.



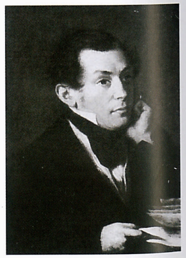
Francišak Hieranim Malieŭski, one of the founders of the Society of the Philomaths. Miniature portrait by an unknown artist of the first half of the 19th century



Anton Edvard Adyniec, poet, author of the *Song of the Philaretes*. Lithograph by Maksymilian Fajans



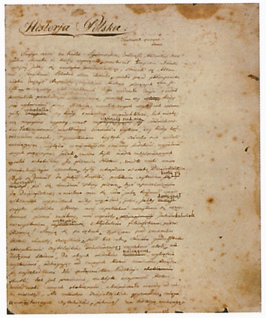
Anuprej Pietraškievič, poet and Philomath archivist. Drawing by Denis Shutkov. 1831



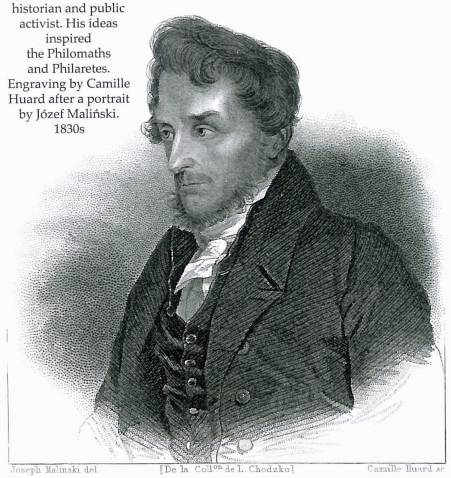
Aliaksandr Mickievič (Aleksander Mickiewicz), brother of the poet Adam. He was involved with student secret societies from their very inception. From picture by an unknown artist of the mid-19th century

CHRONOLOGY

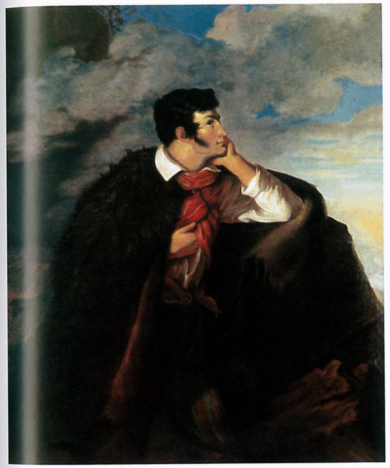
1817 – student secret Society of the Philomaths founded
1825 – Society of Military Friends founded
1836 – underground Democratic Association founded



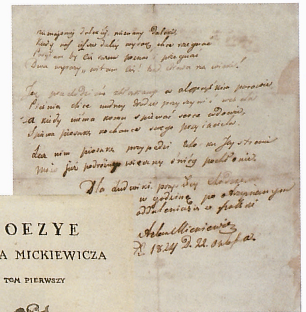
First page of the manuscript of *A History* by Jaŭchim Lialievieĺ. 1813



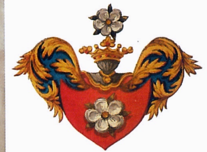
Jaŭchim Lialievieĺ, historian and public activist. His ideas inspired the Philomaths and Philaretes. Engraving by Camille Huard after a portrait by Józef Maliński. 1830s



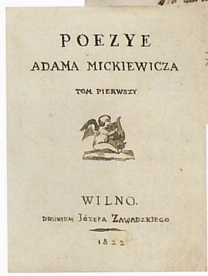
Adam Mickievič on Ayu-Dag (Bear Mountain, a cliff face in the Crimea). Painting by Valiancin Vańkovič. 1827



Autograph of the poem *Nieznajomej, dalekiej* (To one unknown and distant), written shortly before Adam Mickievič went into exile. In it the poet bids farewell to Belarus and the friends of his youth. Vilnia. 1824



Paraj coat of arms, used by the Mickievič family



First edition of poems by Mickievič. Vilnia. 1822

Adam Mickievič glorified his comrades in his immortal poetic drama *Dziady* (Forefathers' Eve). Many of the Philomaths and Philaretes later won renown in various fields. Anton Adyniec (Antoni Odyniec), Jan Čačot (Czeczot), Tamaš Zan and Aliaksandr Chodźka (Aleksander Chodźko) became well-known poets. Jazep Kavalieŭski (Józef Kowalewski) became an acknowledged expert on Mongolia and Rector of Kazan' University. Ihnat Damiejka (Ignacy Domeyko) participated in the national liberation uprising of 1830–1831 and in emigration became famous as a geologist and mineralogist, and expert on Chile.



Philarete memorial stone in Tuhanavičy Park in the vicinity of Karčova, Baranavičy district. The estate of the Vieraščaka family was situated in Tuhanavičy. Adam Mickievič often spent time there



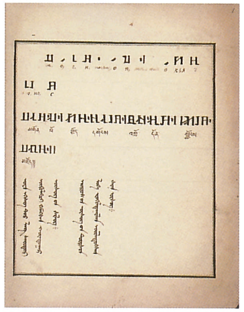
Jan Čačot.
Before he became known as a poet and collector of folklore, Čačot was in charge of the literary section of the Philomath Society. Engraving by F. H. Röber. First half of the 19th century



Danhieĺ coat of arms, used by the Damiejka family



Medal struck in honour of Ihnat Damiejka, geologist and national hero of Chile. In his youth he was a member of the Philomath Society. By medallier F. Venegas. Silver. Obverse. 1885



Title page of the manuscript of *Mongolia* by the former Philomath and Philarete Jazep Kavalieŭski

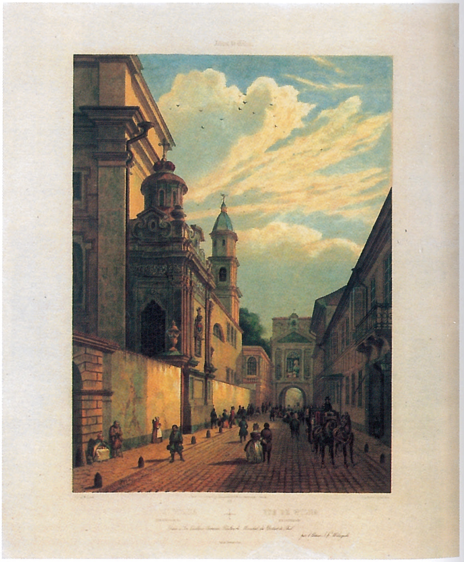
The police uncovered the Philomath Society and its underground branches in 1823. Many of its members found themselves behind bars. Among them were Adam Mickievič, Ihnat Damiejka, Aliaksandr Chodźka, Anton Adyniec, Jan Čačot and Tamaš Zan.

The conspiratorial Society of Military Friends was founded in 1825 by Michal Rukievič, a nobleman and former Philarete.

The aim of the secret Society of Military Friends was to fight for 'liberty' and the 'general well-being'. Its political ideals were close to those of the Decembrists, with whose northern wing they were in contact.

The Military Friends were active in the Special Lithuanian Corps of the tsarist army. The corps was stationed in the Governorate of Horadnia and the Bielastok region. Most of its officers came from the Belarusian governorates. Michal Rukievič (Michał Rukiewicz) found allies among the gentry, civil servants and young people in the schools of the Horadnia and Bielastok regions as well as in the army. One of the leaders of the Military Comrades was Captain Konstantin Igelström, who maintained close contact with the Decembrist Wilhelm Küchelbecker.

However, the fate of Belarus and the Belarusian people was of little concern to the Decembrists; they regarded the tsarist empire as a purely Russian state. Pavel Pestel', the leader and ideologue of the Southern Society of the Decembrists, stated in his *Russkaia Pravda* (Russian Truth) that the Belarusians 'must reject their right to be considered a separate nation'. He simply proposed the abolition of the names of other nations.



Vostraja Brama Street in Viĺnia. Lithograph after a picture by Marcin Zalieski. 1846





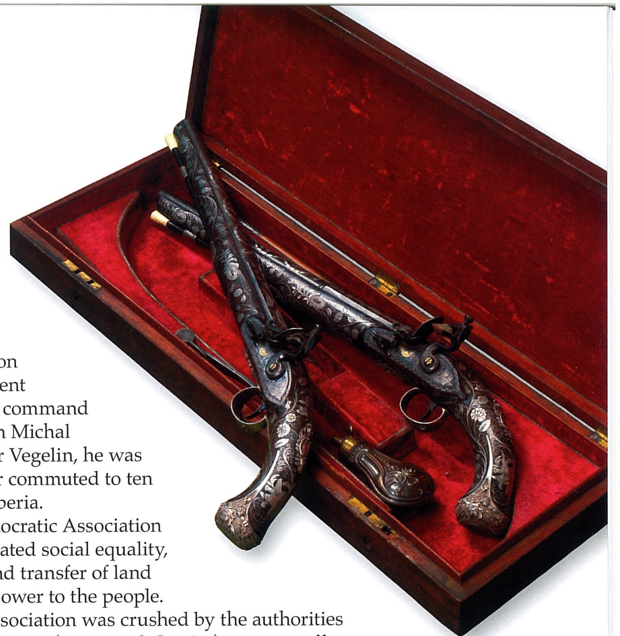


Leaders of the Society of Military Friends (top to bottom) Michal Rukievič, Aleksandr Vegelin, Konstantin Igelström. Watercolours by Nikolai Bestuzhev. 1820s–1830s

In December 1825, ten days after the uprising in St Petersburg, the Military Friends refused to take the oath of allegiance to Tsar Nicholas I in the Battalion of Engineers, one regiment of which was under the command of Igelström. Along with Michal Rukievič and Aleksandr Vegelin, he was sentenced to death, later commuted to ten years' hard labour in Siberia.

Members of the Democratic Association (founded in 1836) advocated social equality, liberation of the serfs and transfer of land to them, and granting power to the people. Three years later the Association was crushed by the authorities and its leader Francišak Savič (Franciszek Sawicz) was sent off to the Caucasus to serve as a soldier.

Another secret society became active in Belarus in the second half of the 1840s – the Fraternal Union of Lithuanian Youth (also called the Union of Free Brothers), founded by the brothers Aliaksandr and Francišak Dalieŭski (Aleksander and Franciszek Dalewski). The society had its centre in Viĺnia, with branches in Miensk, Horadnia, Lida, Navahradak, Slonim and other towns.



Duelling pistols. First half of the 19th century



Ritual paraphernalia of one of the masonic lodges active on the territory of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania

The Free Brothers propagated the idea of fighting against tyranny and national oppression and advocated the creation of a democratic republic. The tsarist police succeeded in smashing this society, too.

However the struggle for liberation from the imperial yoke continued.

The underground Democratic Association was established in the Viĺnia Medico-surgical Academy on the initiative of one of the Academy's students, Francišak Savič.

The Fraternal Union of Lithuanian Youth brought together around two hundred representatives of the gentry, the intelligentsia, craftsmen and peasants.

THE LIBERATION UPRISING OF 1831



Coat
of arms of Ašmiana

It is often said that the Belarusian people have from time immemorial been submissive. However, it was none other than the Belarusian people who – within about 100 years after their country had been seized by the Russian Empire – on three occasions took up arms in order to break free of its deadly embrace. The freedom-loving spirit of Tadevuš Kaściuška and Jakub Jasinski was still alive, and in the spring of 1831 – following Poland – Belarus rose in revolt yet again.

The insurgency was strongest in the Vilnia region, particularly in the counties of Ašmiana, Braslaŭ, Dzisna and Viliejka, and later in the forests of Bielavieža. An insurrection government and military commander were elected in each county and mobilisation was declared.



Francišak Mickievič (Franciszek Mickiewicz), brother of the famous poet, was put in charge of the uprising in Navahradak in April 1831. Drawing by an unknown artist. Mid-19th century





Old coats of arms of the Belarusian towns Braslaŭ (left) and Haradok (right), abolished by the Russian authorities along with the local self-government



Late Baroque Church of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Budslaŭ, Miadziel district. Photograph by Aliaksiej Jaromenka



Archangel Michael. Wood, carved, silver-gilt. Late 18th century. Belarus National Art Museum

CHRONOLOGY

March–April 1831 – uprising begins in Belarus

19 June 1831 – Battle on the Ponary Hills near Vilnia

1831 – Statute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania declared invalid in the Viciebsk and Mahilioŭ governorates



Emilija Pliater, Belarusian folklorist and poet. For her bravery and decisiveness in action she was given the rank of captain. Drawing by an unknown artist. Mid-19th century



Emilija Pliater was the honorary commander of an insurgent infantry company. Contemporaries likened her to Joan of Arc. Lithograph from a drawing by an unknown artist. First half of the 19th century

In the four north-western counties of Belarus the number of insurgents reached 10,000.



Coat of arms of Uhorje. The Pliater family's lands were near there



Most of the insurgents belonged to the nobility. They fought for the restoration of the Commonwealth. The *Hrymala* coat of arms was used by over 40 clans (the Adachoŭski, Adašeŭski, Bartkievič, Hrabaviecki, Hrudzinski, Kaminski, Kazloŭski, Siadliecki, Stravinski, Zialinski and other families)

An armed unit formed by the 25-year-old Countess Emilija Pliater (Emilia Plater) fought some successful engagements on the border between the governorates of Viciebsk and Vilnia. Emilija Pliater was a collector of Belarusian folklore, a poet and revolutionary, who was given the rank of captain and subsequently appointed honorary commander of a company in the insurgent army.

The gentry formed the most important element of the uprising. They fought for the restoration of the Commonwealth within the frontiers of 1772. However, the insurgents were divided into two camps: one revolutionary, the other aristocratic and conservative. The gentry revolutionaries, led by Jaŭchim Lialievieĺ, advocated transfer of land to the peasants (with redemption payments to the landowners) and wanted to wage a war, together with the Russian people, on tsarist autocracy under the slogan 'For our freedom and yours!' The conservative wings acted in an indecisive and contradictory manner. The uprising enjoyed the support of the Catholic and Uniate clergy, but the limited agrarian reform programme meant that not many peasants joined the struggle.

A 3,000-strong force of nobility and peasants took and held the town of Dzisna for several days.

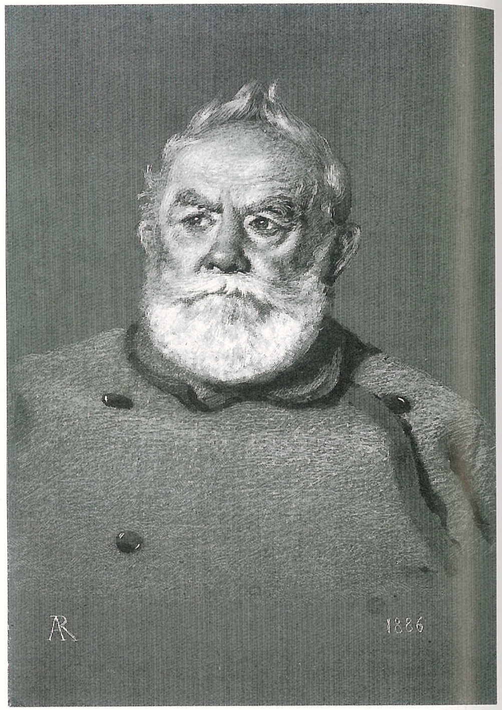


Catholic church in Dzisna, a town liberated by the 1831 insurgents. Postcard of the early 20th century

The inscription on a monument in one of the Vilnia cemeteries says that the tsarist army lost 365 officers and men, killed in the battle on the Ponary Hills. How many men laid down their lives for freedom we shall never know.

The Tsar passed a decree on the resettlement in Belarus 'of immigrants from the governorates deep inside our country, who will bring to this region, now alien to Russia, our language and customs, and the devotion of the Russian people to the throne'.

Portrait of an insurgent by Alfred Romer. Mid-19th century



In May 1831 a well-armed and trained tsarist army of regulars defeated the insurgents in the Miensk and Vilnia governorates, but at the same time the struggle around Horadnia grew more intense. The government in Warsaw sent reinforcements under General Dezydery Chłapowski consisting of 820 officers, non-commissioned officers and instructors. They joined the 12,000-strong corps of General Antoni Giełgud. However, in June the insurgents' united forces were heavily defeated in a battle on the Panary Hills just outside Vilnia.



Darahaslaŭ coat of arms, used by some 60 noble clans (the Astrejka, Buchaviecki, Liaŭkovič, Ramankievič, Trušynski, Tvardoŭski, Volski, Vysocki and other families)

Belarusian noblemen's dress from the Palatinates of Polacak, Miensk and Bieraście. Artist's impression by Ryhor Dolbik

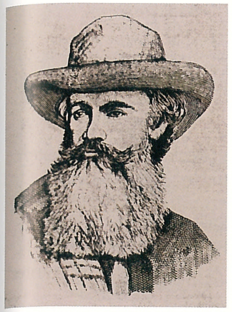




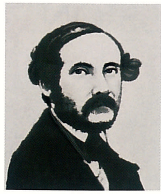
Pallasch (broadsword) with gold basket hilt and silver scabbard. 1831



Pryjaciel coat of arms (the Akinčyc, Aksak, Hraboŭski, Hryníevič, Muśnicki, Ramanoŭski, Tamkovič, Vajciachovič and other families)

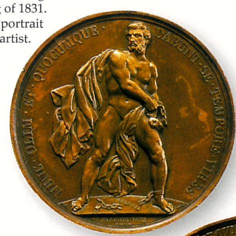


Hienryk Dmachoŭski (Henryk Dmochowski). Participant in the uprising of 1831, he became a well-known sculptor, worked in France and the USA, where he produced busts of Tadevuš Kaściuška and Thomas Jefferson for Congress. Killed in battle during the uprising of 1863. Engraving. 1861



Aliaksandr Rypinski, Belarusian poet, folklorist, artist and publisher, who spent almost 30 years in exile abroad after taking part in the uprising of 1831. Lithograph after a portrait by an unknown artist. 1853

The uprising of 1831 was also of international significance. It prevented the tsarist government from sending troops to suppress the revolution in France.





Medal struck in memory of the uprising of 1831 by Jean-Jacques Barre. Copper. Obverse and reverse. 1832.

The insurgent General Henryk Dembiński led 4,000 of his men westwards through the Horadnia region. They were joined by insurgents from the Navahradak and Slonim counties. In June and July sparks from the uprising reached as far as the Mazyr, Rečyca and Pinsk counties, but the military engagements there were doomed to failure. By August the Russian forces had extinguished the last flames of struggle in Belarus.

The authorities confiscated estates, deprived the nobility of their privileges (10,000 members of the gentry class lost their status in Belarus), educational establishments of all types were closed. The attack on the Uniates was strengthened because of the support given by the Uniate clergy to the insurrection. The tsarist authorities closed 41 monasteries of the Basilian Fathers. This caused Emperor Nicholas I to remark, 'Thank God, we have destroyed a few more of the enemy's strongholds.' In the Viciebsk and Mahilioŭ governorates the Statute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania – legal code that had been in use there since 1588 – was revoked and declared invalid.

Only Russian civil servants were appointed to offices of state.

However, feelings of national honour were growing stronger among the people. Three decades later the country would once again rise up in rebellion.

Catholic Church of St Casimir in Vilnia was given to the Orthodox believers. 1910s photograph by Stanislaŭ Fleury





Ascension of the Blessed Virgin Mary. 17th-century icon. Belarusian school

NATIONAL OPPRESSION



After the uprising of 1831 the tsarist authorities decided on a consistent policy aimed at the complete Russification of Belarus. With this aim in mind they set up the Special Government Committee for the Western Governorates. Its first recommendation was a sharp increase in the amount of land owned by the Russian nobility and senior officials in the territories annexed to the Empire. The new owners would be granted numerous privileges.

In the 1830s Belarus saw purges in the state institutions, courts, education and culture. The dismissed local office holders were replaced by new officials from the governorates of Central Russia, attracted by the additional allowances on top of their salary and the possibility of climbing fast up the career ladder. All records in the state institutions were now kept in Russian.

Triumph of Orthodoxy medal, dedicated to the forcible abolition of the Church Union and the return of Belarusian Uniates to 'the bosom of the faith of their forefathers'. Copper. Obverse and reverse. 1839

Viĺnia University was closed in 1832. At the time it was the only university-level seat of learning in the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Russian also replaced Polish in schools of all levels. It was forbidden even to teach Polish as a language of study. The authorities did not permit the opening of a single Belarusian school throughout the period of tsarist rule in Belarus.



Inhabitants of Belarus being forcibly resettled deep inside the Russian Empire. Engraving by an unknown artist of the mid-19th century



Polacak. Cathedral of St Sophia and the former monastery of the Basilian Fathers (closed by the tsarist authorities). Postcard of the early 20th century

CHRONOLOGY

1832 – Special Government Committee for the Western Governorates created, with the aim of Russifying Belarus

1836 – Russian becomes the language of instruction in the schools of Belarus

1839 – Church Union of Bieraście abolished; Uniates forced to join the Russian Orthodox Church

1840 – by the Tsar's decree the use of the name 'Belarus' is banned in official documents. It is replaced by the term 'North-Western Territory'.

Statute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is declared invalid throughout Belarus; the laws of the Russian Empire are introduced

1859 – use of the Latin script for printing Belarusian is banned

Jasieńčyk coat of arms (the Abuchovič, Bielski, Jasinski, Klimovič, Krajeŭski, Michajloŭski, Žabroŭski, Ždan and other families). After the uprising of 1831 more than 10,000 people were deprived of their noble status





Tsarist assignat of 1837 with face value of 200 roubles. By 1839, as a result of inflation, it was worth only 57 roubles 14 copecks in silver



One of the most enthusiastic supporters of the Russificatory policies was Mikhail Murav'ev, who had at one time taken part in the Decembrist movement. Now he was in a high position in the Belarus governorates and in 1832 was appointed Military Governor of Miensk. He issued a warning to the Belarusian nobility, 'Forget the naive dreams that you have cherished so far. Remember, if you do not become Russians in all your thoughts and feelings, totally devoted to the Fatherland, you will be foreigners here and have to leave the country.'

(above) Church of the Most Holy Trinity in Bienica near Maladziečna. 1701–1704. It was closed in the middle of the 19th century and transformed into an Orthodox church. Photograph by Aliaksiej Jaromienka



Pusloŭski Palace in Kosava, an architectural monument of the mid-19th century. Ivacevičy district. Photograph of the 1990s

Lev Tolstoi and Alexander Herzen expressed their outrage at the widespread violence and humiliations that accompanied the transfer of Belarusian Uniates to Orthodoxy.



The pale of settlement was established in the Russian Empire. Jews had no right to live outside it, and even inside it they were permitted to live only in the towns and *shtetls*. They had to pay considerably higher state taxes than Christians. Detail of mural from the end of the 18th century in a Mahilioŭ synagogue, with allegorical depiction of a dragon

Remains of a Catholic church with late Renaissance features on the site of the former village of Staraja Žosna, Miadziel district. Photograph by Aliaksiej Jaromienka



In the eyes of the Russian church authorities even icons of the Belarusian school of icon painting were suspect. *Adoration of the Shepherds*. 19th-century Belarusian icon



The pressure on the Uniates, who made up three quarters of the population of Belarus, increased sharply. The tsarist authorities succeeded in winning over to their side the high ranking Uniate clergy headed by Iosif Semashko, Bishop of Lithuania, who effectively betrayed the faith of his forefathers.

Ihnat Jazafat Bulhak, the last Uniate Metropolitan. His death removed the final obstacle on the colonisers' road to abolition of the Church Union of Bieraście. Painting by Ivan Chrucki



He forcibly introduced the Russian language into Uniate seminaries and church records. Priests were obliged to use service books sent from Moscow and St Petersburg. All those who disagreed were tried and sentenced like criminals. In full view of the faithful side altars (deemed 'Roman') were thrown out and organs smashed.

Despite the harsh persecution going on in the Belarusian Uniate diocese, only 186 priests out of a total of 680 signed in favour of joining the Orthodox Church in 1838. Even so, a church synod was held in Polacak in the following year under the aegis of the authorities. Semashko set the tone of discussion. For 250 years the Cathedral of St Sophia had been the heart of the Uniate Church in Belarus; now it became the place where the decree was read out announcing the return of the faithful 'to the bosom of the Orthodox faith of their forefathers, henceforth to submit in obedience to the Most Holy Ruling All-Russian Synod'.

The Polacak Synod, organised by the colonisers, did not only liquidate the Uniate Church, but also annulled the independence of the Belarusian Ortodox Church, which had existed for over 500 years, since Grand Duke Hiedzimin established the Lithuanian Metropolitate.

Alexander Herzen published an article in his London-based journal *Kolokol* (The Bell) entitled *Whip-thrashing Orthodoxy*, where he calls Semashko 'a Judas in Christ who has carved himself a monument with a whip on the backs of his defenceless victims'. The closure of Uniate churches, monasteries and schools was accompanied by wholesale burnings of religious and educational books and the destruction of church interiors that did not correspond to the canons of Orthodoxy.

The colonisers were doing their utmost to turn the 'North-Western Territory' into a backwater of the Empire, where all aspects of life would be supported on the backs of the three whales of the Russian superstate ideology: Monarchism, Orthodoxy and Russianness.

The coats of arms of the nobility were a reminder of past freedom and of how traditions were passed down from one generation to the next. Coat of arms of the Zaslaŭski family (centre) combined with other crests



Having prepared the ground by banning the most widespread faith of the people, Emperor Nicholas I then struck a new blow at the very existence of the Belarusian people. By special decree he banned the use of the name 'Belarus' in official documents and replaced it with the term 'North-Western Territory' for use with reference to the Belarusian governorates. Exactly one week later another decree declared that the Statute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was no longer in force in this territory.

Smaliany Castle (*Biely Koviel*) near Vorša, an architectural monument of the 17th century. In the middle of the 19th century its new owner, the Russian Senator Semenov, sold the castle off for bricks. This is how the remains of the tower look today



EDUCATION AND SCIENCE IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY



Seal of Vilnia University

Vilnia University

In 1803 a start was made on educational reform in the Russian Empire by the creation of a Ministry of Education and six regional educational authorities. One of them was based in Vilnia and included all the educational establishments of Belarus. Prince Adam Czartoryski, a close friend of Emperor Alexander I, was appointed curator. Thanks to him the Vilnia Educational Authority enjoyed a certain measure of autonomy and had its own statutes, which were very close to those of the Educational Commission of the Commonwealth. The heart of the regional commission was the University in Vilnia. It was founded after the former Vilnia Academy had undergone several reorganisations.





Vilnia University Rector's staff and lesser seal of office



Vilnia Museum of Antiquities. Lithograph after a drawing by Albert Zamett. Mid-19th century

Globe made for the highest educational institution in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the mid-18th century

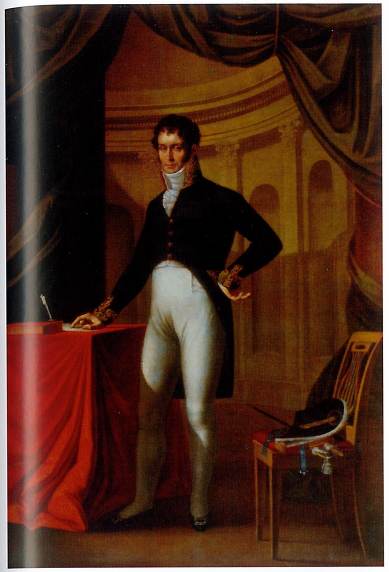




Map of Europe from 17th-century atlas. From the library of Jaŭchim Lialievieĺ

CHRONOLOGY

24 January 1812 – Jesuit College in Polacak is raised to academy status
1820 – Polacak Academy is closed
1822–1830 – Piarist Fathers' grammar school in Polacak is active
1832 – Vilnia University is closed
1848–1864 – Agricultural Institute in Hory-Horki is active



Prince Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, curator of the Vilnia Regional Educational Authority in the years 1803–1824. Appointed head of the Provisional Government during the 1831 uprising, he was then forced to emigrate. Painting by Jazep Aliaškievič. 1810



Professor August Bécu of Vilnia University. He initiated the first programme of vaccination against smallpox in Belarus. Lithograph by Marcel Janušević based on a portrait by Jan Rustem. First half of the 19th century



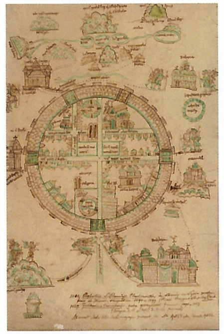
Viencaslaŭ Pielikan, Rector of Vilnia University, Doctor of Medicine and Surgery. Engraving of the second half of the 19th century



Unique document from the university archives – a decree of Grand Duke and King Ściapan Batura



Medal struck in honour of Jaŭchim Lialievieĺ, graduate and professor of Vilnia University, historian and public figure. By medallier F. Hart. Copper. Obverse. 1858



13th-century map of Jerusalem. From the library of Jaŭchim Lialievieĺ



Vilnia University buildings in the mid-19th century. Modern drawing

Among the world-renowned figures to have studied at Vilnia University were the writers Adam Mickievič and Jazep Krašeŭski, the geologist and Rector of the University of Santiago in Chile Ihnat Damiejka, the historians Ihnat Danilovič and Teador Narbut, the artists Valiancin Vańkovič and Hienryk Dmachoŭski, also known as Henry D. Saunders.



Dutch navigational chart of the second half of the 17th century. From the Library of Vilnia University

Teador Narbut, historian and archaeologist, graduate of Vilnia University. Lithograph by Maksymilian Fajans. Late 19th century



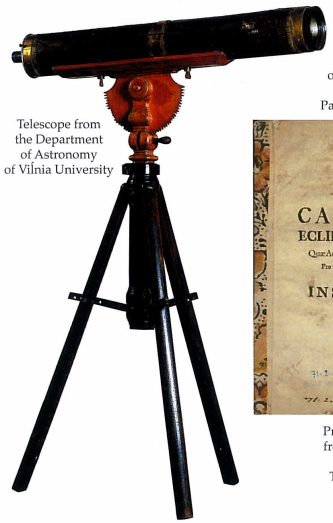
The university had faculties of moral and political sciences, physics and mathematics, medicine, literature and the liberal arts. Attached to the university were institutes of medicine, veterinary science and agronomy, an observatory, a zoological museum, three clinics, one of the richest libraries in Europe and botanical gardens. 36 out of 47 university professors in the 1820s were from the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania.



Medal struck in honour of Marcin Pačobut-Adlianicki, astronomer and Rector of Vilnia University. By medallier Johann Philip Holzhaeusser. Silver. Obverse. 1775

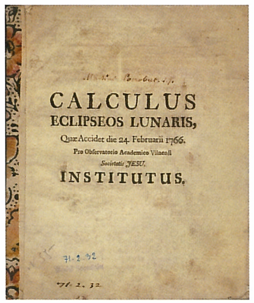
Map of Europe from *Cosmographia* by the German geographer and cartographer Sebastian Münster. 1598





Telescope from the Department of Astronomy of Vilnia University

Treatise on lunar eclipses by Marcin Pačobut-Adlianicki



Münster's *Cosmographia* went through some 50 editions in various languages. From the Library of Vilnia University





Printed book of the early 17th century from the collection of Astafiej Valovič, the Bishop of Vilnia in 1616–1630. The collection passed to the Library of Vilnia University



Commemorative medal with a portrait of the writer and historian Jazep Krašeŭski. In his youth he was expelled from Vilnia University and imprisoned for membership of an underground group. He was the author of more than 600 books in various genres. He often drew inspiration for his novels and stories from events and figures in Belarusian history. By medallier Johan Schwerdtner

Jastrabiec coat of arms used by the Krašeŭski family





Jazep Krašeŭski. In addition to his literary works, he produced a great many historical and ethnographical studies of Belarus. Lithograph by Jean-Baptiste Lafosse

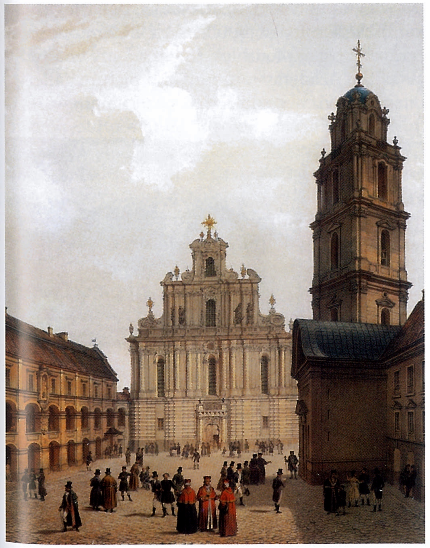


Among the outstanding scientists and scholars of the university were the astronomers Marcin Pačobut-Adlianicki and Jan Śniadecki, the historian Jaŭchim Lialievieĺ, the chemist Andrej Śniadecki (Jędrzej Śniadecki), and the medical doctors Viencaslaŭ Pielikan and August Bécu.

Michal Babroŭski, slavist, one of the pioneers of the Belarusian revival, Professor of Vilnia University. Engraving by an unknown artist of the first half of the 19th century



Jan Śniadecki, astronomer and mathematician, Rector of Vilnia University. 19th-century medal by Vincent Smakoŭski. Alabaster



Vilnia University. Lithograph of the mid-19th century by Phillippe Benois and Jean-Baptiste Baillot from the *Vilnia Album* by Jan Kazimir Vilčynski



Liavon Baroŭski, Professor of Vilnia University. Lithograph after a portrait by Karol Rypinski. 1837

A group of scholars, lecturers and graduates of Vilnia University began to oppose the 'great power' tendencies of Russian and Polish writers to view the Belarusians as an integral part of the Russian or Polish nation. They included Michal Babroŭski, Ihnat Danilovič and Teador Narbut. They adopted a patriotic stance in their studies of the history of the Grand Duchy. They spoke out in favour of the renewal of the Grand Duchy and for its autonomy, and for returning official status to the Belarusian language. They regarded the Uniate Church as the best expression of the religion of Belarusians.

Tadeusz Brzezowski, Superior General of the Society of Jesus. The Polacak Academy was opened during his term of office. Engraving by an unknown artist of the early 19th century



Buildings once part of the Academy in Polacak. Early 20th-century postcard



The Polacak Academy

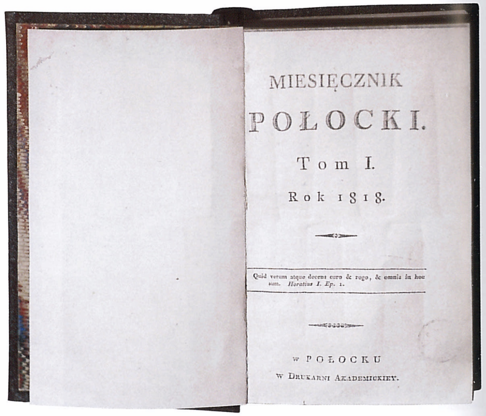
The Jesuit colleges in Polacak, Viciebsk, Vorša, Mahilioŭ and Amścislaŭ continued to provide secondary education. Of these the most important was the college in Polacak, founded in 1581. It had some 300 students. The college curriculum of 1796 listed the following subjects: languages (Polish, Russian, Belarusian, French, German, Latin and Classical Greek), classical literature, history, physical and political geography, algebra, theoretical and practical mechanics, civilian and military architecture, theory of art, ethics, psychology, logic, cosmology, astronomy, experimental physics, higher mathematics, *etc.* The Russian aristocracy often sent their children to Belarus to give them a decent education.

On 24 January 1812 the Polacak College was transformed into an academy with university status. Three faculties opened their doors to students: theology, philology (languages and literatures), philosophy and the liberal arts. In addition to the core elements of the curriculum a whole range of other subjects could be studied: applied mathematics, chemistry, zoology, botany, mineralogy, trigonometry, political economy and statistics, and law. The philological faculty offered for study a wide range of languages and the literatures written in them: Latin, Greek, Biblical Hebrew, Polish, Russian, French, German, Italian and Arabic. The language of instruction was mainly Polish.



Gabriel Gruber, the most famous of the Polacak Jesuits, a scholar and scientist of wide learning. Thanks to him the Polacak College possessed well-equipped laboratories for astronomy, physics and chemistry that matched anything elsewhere in Europe. It was at his initiative that the College opened its own press, museum and art gallery. He created exactly the right kind of conditions for the College to become a university-level Academy. Engraving by an unknown artist. *c* 1805

The Polacak Academy had its own press which published textbooks, dictionaries, scientific treatises, calendars and literary anthologies. It also published a literary and scientific journal called *Miesięcznik Połocki* (The Polacak Monthly). The Academy boasted a library of 40,000 volumes. The collections of the Academy museum and picture gallery were particularly rich. The other Jesuit colleges and schools in the Russian Empire – including those in St Petersburg, Riga and Astrakhan' – were subordinated to the Academy in Polacak.



MIESIĘCZNIK
POŁOCKI.
Tom I.
Rok 1818.

Quid verum atque decens curo & rogo, & omnis in hoc sum. *Horatius I. Ep. 1.*

W POŁOCKU
W DRUKARNI AKADEMICKIEY.

Miesięcznik Połocki (Polacak Monthly), an illustrated literary and scientific journal published by the Polacak Academy



Jaŭstach Tyškievič, founder of the Vilnia Museum of Antiquities. Photograph by Albiert Śviajkoŭski. 1865

Nativity of Christ. Belarusian school of iconography. 1744



Closure of the seats of learning

The educational establishments on the lands seized by Russia became hotbeds of opposition to tsarist rule. The authorities took action to deal with the situation. The tsar's chancellery issued a decree in March 1820 ordering the closure of the Polacak Academy. Its property was transferred into the hands of the Catholic Piarist Order, which opened a grammar school in Polacak two years later. However, this school was eight years later to meet the same fate as its predecessor – it had housed a number of conspiratorial anti-Russian organisations. Vilnia University was also closed in view of the fact that one third of its students had actively participated in the uprising of 1831.

At the end of the 1830s there were seven grammar schools, 17 county schools and 160 elementary schools functioning in the area covered by the Belarus Educational Authority; they had a total of around 12,000 pupils. Only 36% of the teachers were actually from Belarus, and most of them worked in the elementary schools. Instruction in schools at all levels was conducted in Russian, and patriotically-minded teachers were dismissed.

In 1848 the tsarist authorities opened an Agricultural Institute in Hory-Horki in Belarus, the first such college to give university-level training in agricultural sciences in the Empire. It was forced to close, too, after both students and teachers had joined the uprising of 1863.

Among those who started out in the lecture halls of the Polacak Academy on their road to fame were the Belarusian historian, archaeologist and ethnographer Kanstancin Tyškievič, the astronomer and philosopher Jakub Nakcyjanovič, and the pioneer of modern Belarusian literature Jan Barščeŭski (Jan Barszczewski).

Adam Hanory Kirkor. Ethnographer, historian and publisher, he devoted his life to the study and popularisation of the history of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania. He placed special emphasis on the specific ethnographical features of the Belarusian nation and the status of Belarusian as a language in its own right. Photograph by Abdon Korzon. Mid-19th century



Tsarist policies in the first half of the 19th century were dominated by a 'West-Russianist' ideology, according to which the Belarusians were simply a branch of the 'Russian ethnicity'; there was no such thing as a separate Belarusian nation or language and culture. At the same time a number of Polish scholars were endeavouring to prove that Belarus was part of Poland and that the Belarusians were no more than an ethnographical group within the Polish nation.

To counter these 'great power' claims, a start was made on specific ethnographical, archaeological and linguistic studies of Belarus. Great credit is due to the pioneer in the study of Belarusian archaeology, folklore and linguistics Zaryjan Dalienha-Chadakoŭski (pseudonym used by Adam Čarnocki), to the historians Michal Biez-Karnilovič and the brothers Kanstancin and Jaŭstach Tyškievič, and to the ethnographer Paviel Špilieŭski. Much was done for the development of Belarusian culture and learning by the ethnographer, historian, writer and publisher Adam Kirkor and by his colleague Michal Babroŭski. Jaŭstach Tyškievič was the founder of the Vilnia Museum of Antiquities, which opened in 1856.

LITERATURE AND ART IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY

Adam Mickievič. Drawing by Valiancin Vańkovič. 1821



Modern Belarusian literature

The Old Belarusian language of the 'Golden Age' had passed into history. There were two reasons for this: the first was the resolution of the Diet in 1696 to deprive Belarusian of its official status in the Grand Duchy, and the second was that the social élite had been Polonised. The Polonising policies of the aristocracy and the Catholic Church on the one hand and the Russificatory policies of the tsarist authorities on the other created very difficult conditions for the development of a new Belarusian literature. The native tongue was not taught in schools. There were no newspapers or journals in Belarusian. The tsarist censorship kept a very close watch on all reading matter.

Even so, despite all the obstacles a new Belarusian literature was gradually taking root and growing. Its main source of artistic inspiration was Romanticism, which had come on to the scene to replace the Enlightenment and classicism. Romanticism of the progressive type was closely linked to emergent national movements. It unshackled the fantasy and will, brought new life to artistic forms and drew writers to the study of the songs, myths and traditions of their own nation.

The members of the Philomath and Philarete societies were, by the very nature of what they wrote, Romantics. They had known the 'simple tongue' (Belarusian) since childhood, but most of them wrote mainly in Polish. Nevertheless, they emphasised very strongly their devotion to their motherland, which had once been the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. It is indeed unfortunate that none of Adam Mickievič's writings in Belarusian have survived; however, the topics and images of his poetry are imbued with the life, history, folklore and nature of his native Belarus. After all, he came from near the town of Navahradak.

The earliest important works of modern Belarusian literature were the long poems *Enieida navyvarat* (The Aeneid turned inside out) and *Taras na Parnasie* (Taras on Parnassus), which had been previously considered anonymous, now attributed to Vikient Ravinski and Kanstancin Vieranicyn, respectively.



Ihnat Chodźka. His 'Lithuanian' tales and stories were very popular at the time. Engraving by an unknown artist of the mid-19th century

Adam Mickievič's study in his house in Navahradak, now a museum. Reconstruction



While lecturing at the College de France in Paris, Adam Mickievič described Belarusian as 'the most harmonious and the best preserved one of all the Slav languages'.



Statue of Adam Mickievič in Navahradak by Valiarjan Januškievič. 1992

CHRONOLOGY

24 December 1798 – 11 November 1855 – life and work of Adam Mickievič
1794(?)–1851 – life and work of Jan Barščeŭski
7 July 1796 – 23 August 1847 – life and work of Jan Čačot
4 February 1808 – 29 December 1884 – life and work of Vincent Dunin-Marcinkievič
5 May 1819 – 4 June 1872 – life and work of Stanislaŭ Maniuška
29 September 1823 – 15 September 1862 – life and work of Uladzislaŭ Syrakomlia



Medal with portrait of the writer and journalist Vinceś Karatynski by medallier Jan Ostrowski. Copper. Obverse. 1858

Portrait of the poet Uladislaŭ Syrakomlia by Adam Šemieš. 1854

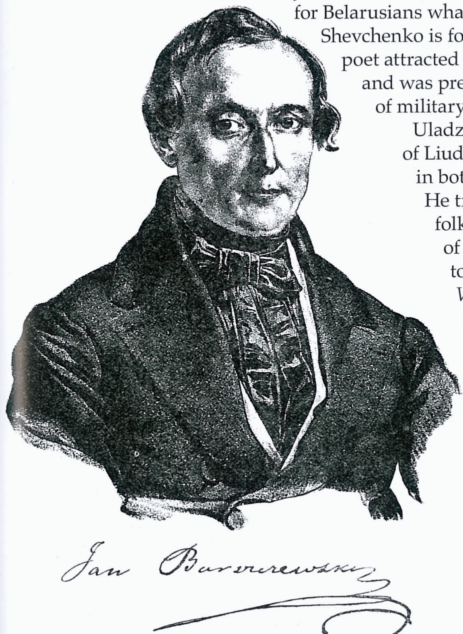


Jan Čačot came from the same region as Mickievič and was a friend of his. He published in Vilnia six collections of the folk songs that he had written down in Belarus. In these collections there were some 30 poems of his own written in Belarusian.

Paŭliuk Bahrym, son of a serf blacksmith from Krošyn in the Navahradak county, possessed an unusual talent for poetry. Only one of his poems has survived, *Zajhraj, zajhraj, chlopča maly* (Play then, play then, lad so little [trans. Vera Rich]), but it is enough to justify the claim that Bahrym could have become for Belarusians what Shevchenko is for Ukrainians. However, the young poet attracted the attention of tsarist investigators and was pressed into a 25-year period of military service.

Uladzislaŭ Syrakomlia – pseudonym of Liudvik Kandratovič – wrote poetry in both Polish and Belarusian. He translated and edited Belarusian folksongs and devoted several works of local history and geography to Belarusian topics, for example *Vandroŭki pa maich bylych vakolicach* (Wanderings around my former abode), *Miensk* and *Nioman ad vytokaŭ da vuścia* (The river Nioman from source to estuary). Under Syrakomlia's influence the poet and journalist Vinceś Karatynski began to write in Belarusian.

After his involvement in the uprising of 1831 the poet and folklorist Aliaksandr Rypinski was forced to emigrate. Once in London he established his own printing shop where he published books of his poetry with his own illustrations.



Jan Barščeŭski, one of the pioneers of modern Belarusian literature. Lithograph by Karol Žukoŭski. 1850



Syrakomlia coat of arms used by the Kandratovič family

Jan Barščeŭski, a graduate of the Polacak Academy, occupies an important place in the history of modern Belarusian literature. His chief work was *Šliachcič Zavalnia, abo Bielaruś u fantastyčnych apaviadanniach* (The nobleman Zavalnia or Belarus in tales of the fantastic), which his contemporaries likened to the Arab tales in *Thousand and one nights*.



Liebiedź
coat of arms,
used by the Dunin-Marcinkievič family

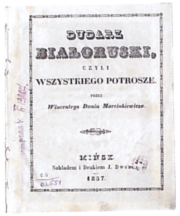


Vincent Dunin-Marcinkievič. Photograph by Anton Prušynski. 1863



Dancing in the village inn. Illustration by K. Brzesski to *Hapon*, a tale in verse by Dunin-Marcinkievič, taken from the edition published in the author's lifetime. 1855.

The greatest contribution to the development of the new Belarusian literature was made by Vincent Dunin-Marcinkievič. He made extensive use of Belarusian folklore in his tales in verse, stories and ballads, for example *Viečarnicy* (Evening gatherings), *Kupala* (St John's eve), *Hapon*, *Ščaroŭskija dažynki* (Harvest-home at Ščary), and his libretto *Idylija* (An Idyll). All his works reflect everyday Belarusian life and customs. He translated *Pan Tadeusz* by Mickievič into Belarusian, but the tsarist censors forbade publication. For his involvement in the uprising of 1863 he was thrown into prison, and then released under police surveillance. In 1866 he completed the bitingly satirical comedy *Pinskaja šliachta* (Pinsk gentlefolk).



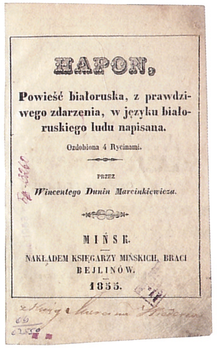
DUDARZ BIAŁORUSKI,
czyli
WSZYSTKIEGO POTROSZE.
MIŃSK
1857.



LUCYNKA
czyli
SZWEDZI NA LITWIE.
OPOWIADANIA HISTORYCZNE,
w 4-ch obrazkach
przez
WINCENTEGO DUNIN MARCINKIEWICZA.
WILNO.
NAKŁADEM I DRUKIEM A. SYRKINA.
1861.

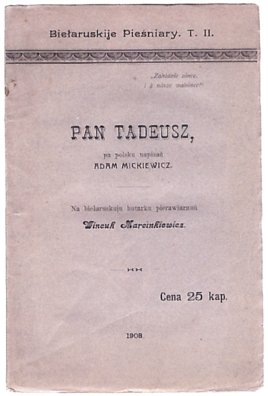
Books by Dunin-Marcinkievič: *Dudar bielaruski* (The Belarusian piper), published in Miensk in 1857 and *Liucynka*, which came out in Vilnia in 1861

Dunin-Marcinkievič's works marked the end of the period of Romanticism in Belarusian literature; they formed a bridge to realism.



HAPON,
Powieść białoruska, z prawdziwego zdarzenia, w języku białoruskiego ludu napisana.
Ozdobiona 4 Rycinami.
przez
Wincentego Dunin Marcinkiewicza.
MIŃSK.
NAKŁADEM KSIĘGARZY MIŃSKICH, BRACI BEJLINÓW.
1855.

Title page of *Hapon*. Dunin-Marcinkievič's works were published in Belarusian, using the Latin script



Biełaruskije Pieśniary. T. II.
PAN TADEUSZ,
po polsku napisał
ADAM MICKIEWICZ.
Cena 25 kap.
1908.

Adam Mickievič's *Pan Tadeusz* in the translation by Dunin-Marcinkievič



Bust of Dunin-Marcinkievič's on his grave at Tupalščyna, not far from the village of Liucynka, Valožyn district. By sculptor Mikalaj Jakavienka. 1977



Wing of the altar or Royal Doors of the Orthodox church of St Barbara, Pinsk. Carved wood, gilt. 18th century



The composer Stanislaŭ Maniuška. Lithograph by Jean-Baptiste Lafosse from the *Vilnia Album* by Jan Kazimir Vilčynski. Mid-19th century



Kryŭda
coat of arms used by the Maniuška family

Theatre and music

This was a period when the magnates and wealthy nobility owned private theatres, orchestras and choirs. Particularly noted for their high standards of professionalism were the Radzivil theatre in Niaśviž, the Tyškievič theatre in Švislač, the Ahinski theatre in Slonim, the Zorich theatre in Škloŭ, and the Chernyshev theatres in Čačersk and Mahilioŭ. Talented serf players and performers were sold to the imperial theatres in St Petersburg and Moscow. For example, the leading ladies of the Škloŭ theatre ballet – Pielahieja and Kaciaryna Azarevič – performed with great success on the stages of both capitals of the Empire, as did Kaciaryna's two daughters, Maryja and Nadzieja.

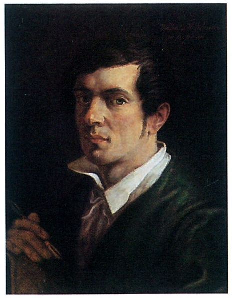
At the initiative of Dunin-Marcinkievič and under his direction a Belarusian national theatre was coming into being in the 1840s and 1850s. The operettas *Sialianka* (*Idylija*) (The village girl (An Idyll)) and *Rekrucki nabor* (Collecting army recruits) were staged. Dunin-Marcinkievič himself wrote the librettos to both of them; he had a real talent for comedy.

His daughter Kamila, a pupil of the composer Stanislaŭ Maniuška (Stanisław Moniuszko), was musically very gifted. The pianist and composer Anton Abramovič started writing pieces in the national style based on folk songs and dances. He wrote a piece entitled *Belarusian melodies* and set the Belarusian poems of Jan Barščeŭski to music.

The brothers Vincent and Daminik Stafanovič were the outstanding Belarusian musicians of their time. They were for many years the directors of the Miensk City Orchestra. It was in Miensk that Stanislaŭ Maniuška began his career in music. He was born in Ihumien county and became a pupil of Daminik Stafanovič. Eventually he was appointed Director of the Warsaw Opera, where he wrote his famous opera *Halka*. He also wrote twelve songs based on poems by Jan Čačot.



Maniuška's house in Miensk. Drawing by Viktar Staščaniuk



Valiancin Vańkovič. Self-portrait. 1840



Miensk manor of Valiancin Vańkovič. Drawing by Viktar Staščaniuk



Valiancin Vańkovič. Portrait of a man in a yellow waistcoat. 1836

Painting

Historical themes were the favourite subjects for Valiancin Vańkovič, for example his well-known canvasses *Mickievič on Ayu-Dag* and *Napoleon by the campfire*. Similar subjects were also chosen by the painter Jan Damiel: *The Baptism of the Slavs, The death of Grand Master Ulrich von Jungingen in the Battle of Grunwald, Liberation of Kaściuška from prison, The departure of the French through Vilnia in 1812.*

The painting of the time concentrated on portraits and historical themes. One of the great masters was the Belarusian artist Jazep Aliaškievič. He painted portraits of Adam Mickievič, Lieŭ Sapieha, Michal Gedeon Radzivil and Adam Czartoryski.



Portait of Jazep Aliaškievič by an unknown artist. First half of the 19th century



Jazep Aliaškievič. Group portrait. 1813



Francišak Smuhlievič. Self-portrait. In 1797 this talented artist established a Department of Drawing and Painting in Vilnia University. His work had a considerable influence on the development of art in Belarus



Francišak Smuhlievič. *Litvin peasants*. Late 18th century

Francišak Smuhlievič. *Persian envoys at the court of the King of Morocco*. 1785





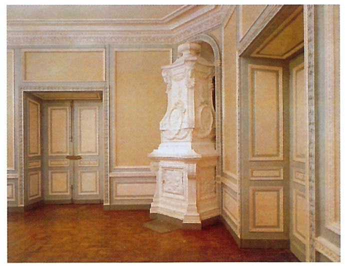
Jan Damiel. Self-portrait. 1817



Jan Rustem. Self-portrait. 1810s



Jan Rustem. Allegorical portrait of Maryja Mirskaja, Barbara Šumskaja and Adam Napalieon Mirski. 1808



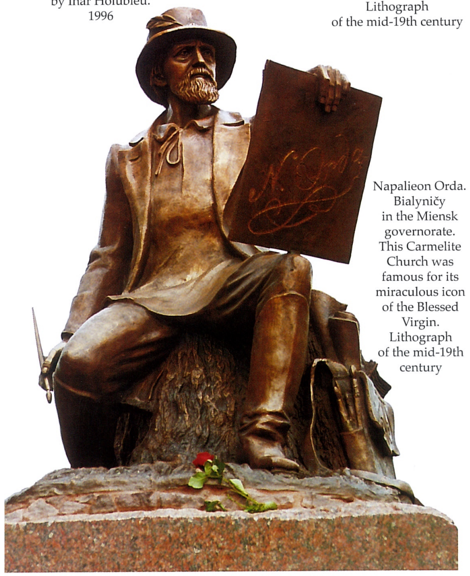
Interior of the Radzivil palace in Niasviž. Photograph of the 1980s



Napalieon Orda. Vysokaje in the Horadnia governorate, one of the old landholdings of the princely Sapieha family. Orda made several trips around the whole of Belarus and produced more than 200 drawings of landmarks, buildings and localities associated with the lives of famous people. Lithograph of the mid-19th century



Artist and composer Napalieon Orda. Self-portrait. Mid-19th century



Statue of Napalieon Orda in Ivanava (Janaŭ-Palieski) by Ihar Holubieŭ. 1996



Napalieon Orda. Biaroza Kartuzskaja. Carthusian monastery founded in 1618 by Lieŭ Sapieha on the river Jasieĺda. Lithograph of the mid-19th century



Napalieon Orda. Bialyničy in the Miensk governorate. This Carmelite Church was famous for its miraculous icon of the Blessed Virgin. Lithograph of the mid-19th century



Ivan Chrucki. Still life with flowers and fruit. 1839



Ivan Chrucki. Family portrait. 1850



Ivan Chrucki. Self-portrait. 1880s



Ivan Chrucki. Portrait of an unknown woman with flowers and fruit. 1838

Jazep Pieška (Józef Peszka) Self-portrait. Early 19th century



Jazep Pieška. Vilnia town hall. Watercolour. 1808



Ivan Chrucki was a recognised master of still lifes, portraits and landscapes.

Despite the national oppression Belarusian culture was beginning to extend its influence to ever wider spheres of activity. More and more writers, artists and thinkers were coming to recognise the existence of a separate Belarusian nation, with its own history, language and traditions.

LIBERAL REFORMS



Train pulls into the station at Bieraście. Postcard of the early 20th century

The first and most important of the reforms which the imperial government of Russia was forced to introduce was the abolition of serfdom. Tsar Alexander II signed both the Manifesto announcing the emancipation of the serfs and the accompanying Regulations on 3 March 1861. The peasants gained their personal liberty and the right to manage their own property. The land itself remained in the hands of the landed gentry (*abšarniki*); they were, however, obliged to transfer to the peasants for their permanent use the cottages in which they lived and the attached outhouses plus an allocation of land. In exchange the peasants had to fulfil certain compulsory work duties for the landowners. The peasants had the right to purchase their homestead and land allotment, but the fixed price was considerably higher than the market value.



Šaliha coat of arms used by the Pusloŭski family of entrepreneurs and patrons of the arts



Barge on the river Prypiać. Photograph by H. Sabkievič. Early 20th century



Villager from near Liepieĺ. Photograph of the 1870s

Landowners determined the size of plots of land for peasants, their duties and how they were to be carried out. The 1861 reform left most peasants robbed.

There were two specific regulations covering the application of the 1861 reform to Belarus; they contained a number of local features. For example, the peasants in the Miensk, Horadnia and Viĺnia governorates had the right to the land that they had tilled for their own use when they were serfs, but the landowners had the right to take 'cut-offs' from it. The peasants had the right to purchase their land allotments only after nine years had elapsed. In the meantime the peasants were regarded as 'temporarily under obligation to the landowners' and had to work *corvée* or pay quit-rent for the right to use their plot of land, just as they had done before the reform.



Peasants from Barysaŭ county. Photograph of the second half of the 19th century

CHRONOLOGY

3 March 1861 – serfdom is abolished
1862–1874 – general military conscription is introduced
1864 – no language other than Russian may be used in places of education



Advertisement for the Miensk governorate firm representing the Mal'tsev factories that were famous throughout the Russian Empire

Skoki, village near Bieraście. Lithograph after a drawing by Napalieon Orda. Mid-19th century



These 'temporarily compulsory' duties of the peasants to the landowners in the governorates of Viĺnia, Miensk and Horadnia and part of the governorate of Viciebsk were lifted on 1 March 1863. The move was accompanied by a reduction of one-fifth in the redemption payments. The authorities wanted to prevent the peasants from joining the armed national liberation uprising of that year. In fact these modifications did nothing to change the predatory nature of the reform: more than half of the best land still remained in the hands of the landowners.

Outbursts of unrest following the promulgation of the Tsar's Manifesto and the 1863 uprising in particular forced the government to amend the terms of the reform in Belarus.



Vaŭkavysk. Photograph of the early 20th century



Townsfolk. Ceramics of the late 19th century



Homespun belts from Belarus



Street in Bieraście. Postcard of the early 20th century

Military reforms were carried out in the years 1862–1874. They introduced a system of conscription for all 20-year-old males in the Russian Empire to replace the previous method of recruiting as a means of maintaining the size of the army. The term of military service was reduced to six years in the army and to seven in the navy.

Reforms of the local government, judicial and school systems were begun in 1864. The first of these provided for the creation of elected local councils (assemblies, *ziemstvy*) in the counties and governorates that would have responsibility for the local economy, education and health care. However, for political reasons the law which established these local councils did not extend to Belarus.

Judicial reform in Belarus was late to get under way. Because there was no system of local government there, justices of the peace were not elected but appointed by the Minister of Justice and answerable to him. It was not until 1882 that local courts with juries were set up in the western governorates of the Russian Empire; even then the authorities reserved the right to draw up and confirm the jury lists.



Labels from bottles of beer produced in the breweries of Lida and Homiel

In contrast to the governorates of central Russia, Belarus had no schools under the control of the local authorities, and local people were not permitted to participate in school management.



State credit note with a face value of 10 roubles. 1878

Liepieĺ. Postcard with a view of a lock on the Biarezina canal system linking the basins of the Dźvina and Dnieper rivers. Early 20th century





Horadnia Hussar Regiment of the Imperial Guard: general and junior officer. Lithograph. 1869



Sugar bowl, teapot and cream jug. Second half of the 19th century

Instead of the Russian Regulations for General Elementary Schools of 1864 a special set of Provisional Rules for Popular Schools was applied in Belarus.

The censorship was to a certain extent relaxed by the reform of 1865, but significant restrictions were placed both on the granting of permission to print new periodical publications and on the range of issues that could be discussed in print.

In 1875, five years later than in Russia, a start was made on reforming the way in which the towns and cities of Belarus were governed. The reform was based on the liberal principle of suffrage linked to a property qualification. Such a system ensured that the representatives of the wealthier middle classes would always hold a majority on the town councils. The council would elect an executive board (*uprava*), the chairman of which would effectively be the mayor of the town or city.

The liberal trends of the reforms of the 1860s and 1870s were inconsistent and contradictory. This became especially clear in Belarus and other non-Russian margins of the Empire.



Kupieckaja (Merchant) Street in Horadnia. Postcard of the early 20th century



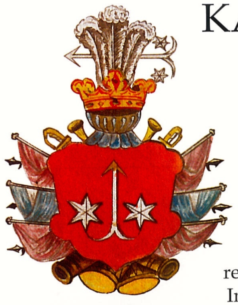
Carpenter from the region along the Dźvina river. Photograph of the second half of the 19th century

In 1864 the Ministry of Education issued an edict forbidding students in all educational institutions to speak any language other than Russian.



Branicki Palace in Bielastok. Photograph of the 1970s

KASTUŚ KALINOŬSKI



Kalinova coat of arms, used by the Kalinoŭski family

In 1863 Belarus once again took up arms against Russian imperial oppression. The uprising was led by a heroic young man called Kastuś Kalinoŭski.

This national hero of Belarus was born in Mastaŭliany, a village in Horadnia county (now in the Bielastok (Białystok) province of Poland).

Vincent Kanstancin Kalinoŭski came from a gentry family. The future revolutionary received his primary education in the Śvislač grammar school. In 1856 he entered the law faculty of St Petersburg University; he graduated with a first degree in law four years later. In his student years he had already chosen the path of political struggle with autocracy; both he and his brother Viktar joined the revolutionary group of Zyhmunt Sierakoŭski (Zygmunt Sierakowski) and Jarasłaŭ Dambroŭski (Jarosław Dąbrowski). Kalinoŭski returned to Belarus determined to take up the fight against tsarism.

He became the driving force behind the revolutionary organisation in Horadnia which he himself had founded. He travelled round the surrounding areas spreading revolutionary propaganda among the peasants, preparing them for the uprising. The underground Belarusian newspaper *Mužyckaja Praŭda* (Peasants' Truth) played an essential role in this activity. Clearly talented as a journalist and writer, Kalinoŭski started publishing the newspaper in 1862, together with other members of the Horadnia revolutionary organisation, Fieliks Ražanski (Feliks Rożański, Stanislaŭ Sanhin (Stanisław Sangin) and Valier Urublieŭski (Walery Wróblewski). Kastuś himself wrote most of the material and also took part in distributing it around the villages and strewing copies by the roadside. He was attempting to dispel the peasants' illusions by showing that the Tsar's Manifesto on the abolition of serfdom was just another way of deceiving the people.

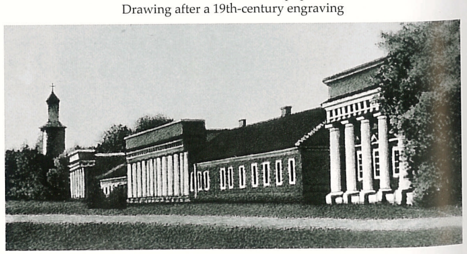


Kastuś Kalinoŭski.
Photograph by Achille Banoldi. 1862

CHRONOLOGY

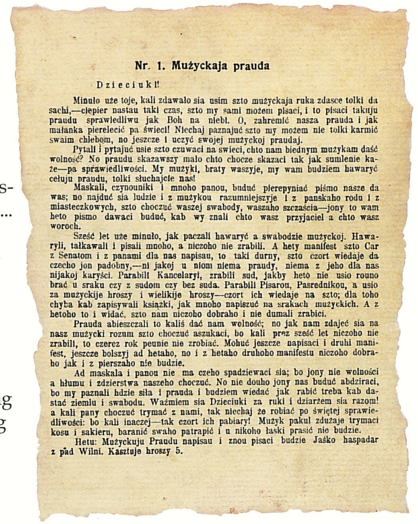
2 February 1838 – birth of Kastuś Kalinoŭski
1862–1863 – publication of the underground *Mužyckaja Praŭda*, the first newspaper in Belarusian
11 March 1863 – Kalinoŭski is appointed insurgent commissar for the Horadnia governorate
31 July 1863 – Kalinoŭski is once more in command of the uprising in Belarus and Lithuania
22 March 1864 – Kalinoŭski is hanged in Vilnia

Building of the grammar school in Śvislač where Kalinoŭski was a pupil.
Drawing after a 19th-century engraving



Kastuś Kalinoŭski was very much influenced by his elder brother Viktar, a student at Moscow University. There he was researching old Belarusian manuscripts on behalf of the Vilnia Archaeological Commission.

First issue of *Mužyckaja Praŭda*



Nr. 1. Mużyckaja prauda

Dzieciuki!

Minuło uże toje, kali zdawało sia usim szto mużyckaja ruka zdasce tolki da sachi,—ciepier nastau taki czas, szto my sami możem pisaci, i to pisaci takuju praudu sprawiedliwu jak Boh na niebi. O, zahremić nasza prauda i jak małanka pierelecić pa świeci! Niechaj paznajuć szto my możem nie tolki karmić swaim chlebom, no jeszcze i uczyć swojej mużyckoj praudaj.

Pytali i pytajuć usie szto czuwaci na swieci, chto nam biednym mużykam dašć wolność? No praudu skazawszy mało chto chocze skazaci tak jak sumlenie każe—pa sprawiedliwości. My mużyki, braty waszyje, my wam budziem hawaryć całuju praudu, tolki słuchajcie nas!

Maskali, czynouniki i mnoho panou, buduć pierepyniać pismo nasze da was; no najduć sia ludzie i z mużykou razumniejszyje i z panskaho rodu i z miasteczkowych, szto choczuć waszej swabody, waszaho szczaścia—jony to wam heto pismo dawaci buduć, kab wy znali chto wasz przyjaciel a chto wasz woroch.

Sześć let uże minuło, jak paczali hawaryć a swabodzie mużyckoj. Hawaryli, tałkawali i pisali mnoho, a niczoho nie zrabili. A hety manifest szto Car z Senatom i z panami dla nas napisau, to taki durny, szto czort wiedaje da czecho jon padobny,—ni jakoj u niom niema praudy, niema z jeho dla nas nijakoj karyści. Parabili Kancelaryi, zrabili sud, jakby heto nie usio rouno brać u sraku czy z sudom czy bez suda. Parabili Pisarou, Pasrednikou, a usio za mużyckije hroszy i wielikije hroszy—czort ich wiedaje na szto; dla toho chyba kab zapisywali książki, jak mnoho napiszuć na srakach mużyckich. A z hetoho to i widać, szto nam niczoho dobraho i nie dumali zrabici.

Prauda abieszczali to kaliś dać nam wolność; no jak nam zdajeć sia na nasz mużycki rozum szto choczuć aszukaci, bo kali prez sześć let niczoho nie zrabili, to czerez rok peunie nie zrobiać. Mohuć jeszcze napisaci i druhi manifest, jeszcze bolszyj ad hetaho, no i z hetaho druhoho manifestu niczoho dobraho jak i z pierszaho nie budzie.

Ad maskala i panou nie ma czeho spadziewaci sia; bo jony nie wolności a hłumu i zdzierstwa naszeho choczuć. No nie douho jony nas buduć abdziraci, bo my paznali hdzie siła i prauda i budziem wiedać jak rabić treba kab dastać ziemlu i swabodu. Waźmiem sia Dzieciuki za ruki i dziarżem sia razom! a kali pany choczuć trymać z nami, tak niechaj że robiać po świętej sprawiedliwości: bo kali inaczej—tak czort ich pabiary! Mużyk pakul zdużaje trymaci kosu i sakieru, baranić swaho patrapić i u nikoho łaski prasić nie budzie.

Hetu: Mużyckuju Praudu napisau i znou pisaci budzie Jaśko haspadar z pad Wilni. Kasztuje hroszy 5.

The *Mužyckaja Praŭda* reached all the corners of Belarus. This is how the paper addressed the common people, 'In our country, lads, they teach you in the schools only to read the Muscovite language for the purpose of turning you into Muscovites... For our having served the Tsar 25 years in wars without decent food and clothing – not only does he deny us the status of gentry – but, dog that he is, he doesn't even give us a piece of land, so that, even with back-breaking work, a man might live until he dies in peace... What's more, you commit a sin before God by assisting the Muscovite, which God will never forgive you. The French are coming to give the peasants their freedom, the townspeople are in revolt and the young people are standing up for their freedom and faith and ours, while we are providing recruits; and the Muscovite Tsar, shielding himself with our breasts and our hands, is suppressing revolts... It was he who, having bribed many priests... paid money so that we would convert to Orthodoxy, and, like the Antichrist, took our true Uniate faith away from us and destroyed us before God for eternity; and he did this in order to be able to plunder us endlessly and so that our just God wouldn't have mercy on us.'

Śvislač, a small town in the Horadnia governorate.
Lithograph after a drawing by Napalieon Orda.
Mid-19th century



Each issue of *Mužyckaja Praŭda* was always signed by Kalinoŭski, using the pseudonym 'Jaśka, yeoman from near Viĺnia' and focused on one topic. The paper revealed the real nature of the authorities' Russifying policies and raised matters like religious oppression and the press-ganging of men into military service.



Insurgent is led under arrest through city streets. Drawing of the time



Insurgent from near Polacak. Photograph. 1863

Kalinoŭski and his comrades-in-arms trod this Horadnia street. Photograph by Anatoĺ Kliaščuk



The seventh, and final, issue of the *Mužyckaja Praŭda* appeared when the uprising had already started. It contained an open call to join the fight against the Russian colonialists, 'Think well and having prayed to God, let's all stand together for our freedom! The Tsar will fool us no longer – nor will we be taken in by the Muscovites. There is neither bread nor water for them in our villages. We are deaf and dumb as far as they are concerned – we have neither seen nor heard anything. And while there's still time, our boys must hurry with pitchforks and scythes where they are fighting for freedom and truth.'

By autumn 1862 Kalinoŭski had already become chairman of the Lithuanian Provincial Committee, which was then preparing for an armed liberation uprising in Belarus. Kastuś was the acknowledged leader of the most consistent revolutionaries, nicknamed 'the reds' to distinguish them from the more liberal-minded 'whites'.



Capsule revolver of the type used by the insurgents of 1863

The 'reds' opposed the inequality of the social classes, advocating the creation of a democratic republic and transfer of land to the peasants. Kalinoŭski believed that the peoples of Belarus, *Lietuva* and Ukraine should make their own decision on independence. The 'whites' sought the restoration of the Commonwealth within the frontiers of 1772.



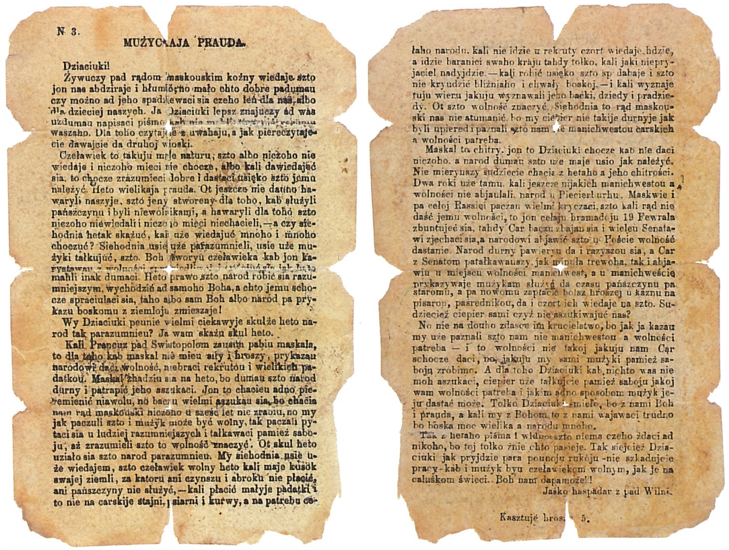
Insurgents' camp in the area of Miensk. Engraving. 1863

After the start of the uprising the 'whites' managed to keep Kalinoŭski and his comrades-in-arms out of the command structure. He became the insurgency commissar for the Horadnia governorate and succeeded in persuading a large number of peasants to join the armed struggle.

The uprising in Belarus had been almost totally suppressed when one of the insurgents – Vitaŭt Parfijanovič, the insurgency commissar for the Mahilioŭ governorate – betrayed Kalinoŭski under interrogation. In February 1864 the 'dictator of the insurgency', who was living within St John's walls, next to St John's Cathedral in Viĺnia under the name of Ihnat Vitaženiec, was arrested there by the tsarist gendarmes.

After the order for his arrest had been issued Kastuś Kalinoŭski operated under several conspiratorial names, such as, for example, Makarevič, Čarniecki, Chamovič and Chamucius.

In the summer of 1863 Kalinoŭski once again took charge of the central command of the insurgency in Viĺnia.



N 3.

MUŽYCKAJA PRAUDA.

Dziaciuki!

Żywuczy pad rądom maskouskim kożny wiedaje szto jon nas abdziraje i hłumić, no mało chto dobre padumau czy możno ad jeho spadziewaci sia czeho leń dla nas, albo dla dzieciej naszych. Ja Dziaciuki lepsz znajuczy ad was uzdumau napisaci piśmo [illegible] waszaho. Dla toho czytajcie z uwahaju, a jak pierećzytajecie dawajcie da druhoj wioski.

Czeławiek to takuju maje naturu; szto albo niczoho nie wiedaje i niczoho mieci nie chocze, albo kali dawiedajeć sia, to chocze zrazumieci dobre i dastaci usięko szto jemu należyć. Heto wielikaja prauda. Ot jeszcze nie daŭno hawaryli naszyje, szto jeny stworeny dla toho, kab służyli pańszczynu i byli niewolnikami, a hawaryli dla toho szto niczoho niewiedali i niczoho mieci niechacieli, — a czy siehodnia hetak skażuć, kali uże wiedajuć mnoho i mnoho choczuć? Siehodnia usie uże parazumnieli, usie uże mużyki tałkujuć, szto Boh stworyu czeławieka kab jon karystawau z wolności [illegible] mahli inak dumaci. Heto prawo szto narod robić sia razumniejszym, wychodzić ad samoho Boha, a chto jemu schocze spraciulaci sia, taho albo sam Boh albo narod pa prykazu boskomu z ziemloju zmieszaje!

Wy Dziaciuki peunie wielmi ciekawyje skulże heto narod tak parazumnieu? Ja wam skażu skul heto.

Kali Prancuz pad Swistopolom zausim pabiu maskala, to dla toho kab maskal nie mieu siły i hroszy, prykazau narodowi daci wolność, niebraci rekrutou i wielikich padatkou. Maskal zhadziu sia na heto, bo dumau szto narod durny i patrapić jeho aszukaci. Jon to chacieu adno pieremienić niawolu, no baczu wielmi aszukau sia, bo chacia nam rąd maskouski niczoho u sześć let nie zrabiu, no my jak paczuli szto i mużyk może być wolny, tak paczali pytaci sia u ludziej razumniejszych i tałkawaci pamież saboju, aż zrazumieli szto to wolność znaczyć. Ot skul heto uziało sia szto narod parazumnieu. My siehodnia usie uże wiedajem, szto czeławiek wolny heto kali maje kusok swajej ziemli, za katoru ani czynszu i abroku nie płacić, ani pańszczyny nie służyć, — kali płacić małyje padatki i to nie na carskije stajni, i siarni i kurwy, a na patrebu całaho narodu, kali nie idzie u rekruty czort wiedaje hdzie, a idzie baranici swaho kraju tahdy tolko, kali jaki nieprypjaciel nadyjdzie. — kali robić usięko szto sp[illegible] dabaje i szto nie kryudzić bliźniaho i chwały boskoj. — i kali wyznaje tuju wieru jakuju wyznawali jeho baćki, dziedy i pradziedy. Ot szto wolność znaczyć. Siehodnia to rąd maskouski nas nie atumanić, bo my ciepier nie takije durnyje jak byli upiered i paznali szto nam nie manichwestou carskich a wolności patreba.

Maskal to chitry. jon to Dziaciuki chocze kab nie daci niczoho. a narod dumau szto uże maje usio jak należyć. Nie mieryuszy sudziecie chacia z hetaho a jeho chitrości. Dwa roki uże tamu. kali jeszcze nijakich manichwestou a wolności nie abjaulali. narod u Piecierburhu. Maskwie i pa celoj Rassięi paczau wielmi kryczaci, szto kali rąd nie daść jemu wolności, to jon celaju hramadoju 19 Fewrala zbuntujeć sia, tahdy Car baczu zbajau sia i wieleu Senatawi zjechaci sia, a narodowi abjawić szto u Poście wolność dastanie. Narod durny pawieryu da i razyszou sia, a Car z Senatom patałkawauszy. jak minuła trewoha, tak i abjawiu u miejscu wolności manichwest, a u manichweście prykazywaje mużykam służyć da czasu pańszczynu pa staromu, a pa nowomu zapłacić bolsz hroszej u kaznu na pisarou, pasrednikou, da i czort ich wiedaje na szto. Sudziecież ciepier sami czyż nie aszukiwajuć nas?

No nie na douho zdasce im krucielstwo, bo jak ja kazau my uże paznali szto nam nie manichwestou a wolności patreba — i to wolności nie takoj jakuju nam Car schocze daci, no jakuju my sami mużyki pamież saboju zrobimo. A dla toho Dziaciuki kab nichto was nie moh aszukaci, ciepier uże tałkujcie pamież saboju jakoj wam wolności patreba i jakim adno sposobom mużyk jeju dastać może. Tolko Dziaciuki śmieło, bo z nami Boh i prauda, a kali my z Bohom to z nami wajawaci trudno bo boska moc wielika a narodu mnoho.

Tak z hetaho piśma i widno szto niema czeho żdaci ad nikoho, bo toj tolko żnie chto pasieje. Tak siejcież Dziaciuki jak pryjdzie para pouncju rukoju -nie szkadujcie pracy - kab i mużyk byu czeławiekom wolnym, jak je na całuśkom świeci. Boh nam dapamoże!!

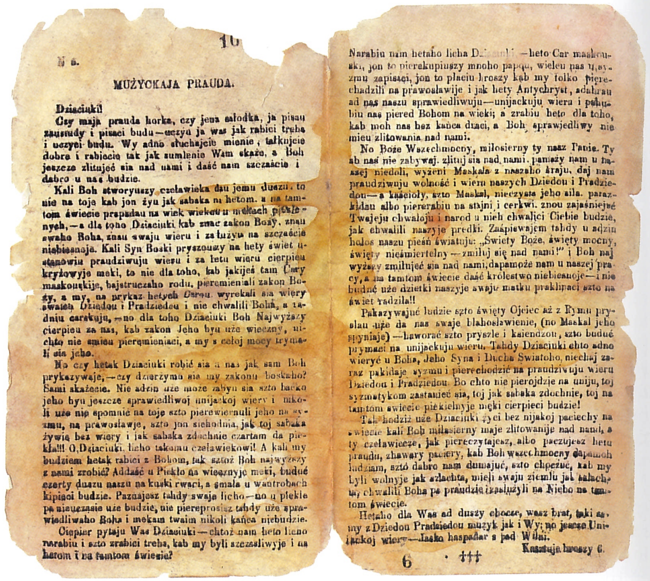
Jaśko haspadar z pad Wilni.

Kasztuje hros[illegible] 5.

Copies of the *Mužyckaja Praŭda* were read so many times that they often quite literally fell to pieces, as can be seen from this specimen of the first-ever newspaper printed in Belarusian

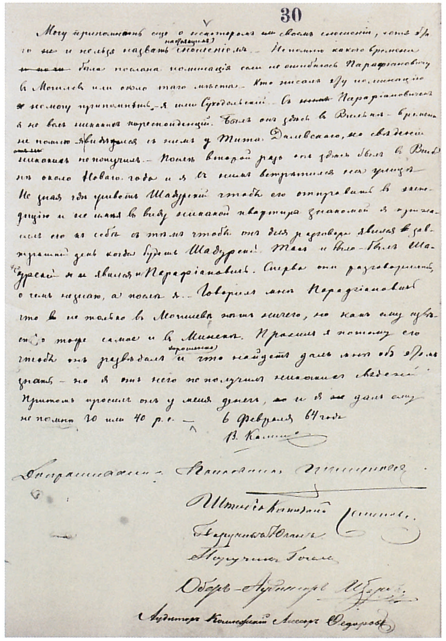


Mikhail Murav'ev, the Tsar's satrap. He was in charge of crushing the national liberation movement on the lands of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In his youth he had been involved with the Decembrist movement but he ended his days with the nickname 'Hangman'. Engraving of the second half of the 19th century



Sixth issue of the *Mužyckaja Praŭda*

Kalinoŭski's statement, made during his interrogation on 18 (6 according to the Julian calendar) February 1864

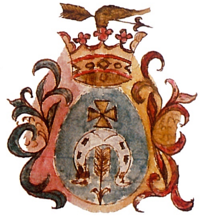


Kalinoŭski behaved with extraordinary bravery both under interrogation and in court. In response to a proposal to lessen the severity of his sentence by naming some other insurgents and giving addresses, he said, 'Being open and honest in our everyday dealings is a virtue, becoming an informer sullies a person. My sense of honour and dignity, as well as the position I held in society, forbid me to take any other path.'

The tsarist field court martial sentenced Kalinoŭski to death by hanging. The sentence was carried out on 22 March 1864 on Lukiški market square in Vilnia.

Kastuś managed to have his final appeal to the people, *List z-pad šybienicy* (Letter from beneath the gallows), smuggled out of prison, 'My brothers, dear peasants! I have to write to you from beneath the Muscovite gallows and perhaps for the last time. It is sad to leave my native land and you, my dear people. Although my breast will sigh and my heart will ache, I don't regret perishing for your truth... There is no greater happiness on this earth, brothers, than if a man has intellect and learning... But just as day and night do not reign together, so also true learning does not go together with

Among the more than 150 noble families using the *Daluha* coat of arms were those with the surnames Arcimovič, Barejka, Dambroŭski, Harecki, Hraboŭski, Jasienski, Kavalieŭski, Kliučeŭski, Liasoŭski, Makaviecki, Šyrma and Šyška. Many of these clans played an active role in the uprising led by Kalinoŭski



Insurgents. Photograph of 1863





Zyhmunt Sierakoŭski (Zygmunt Sierakowski), one of Kalinoŭski's associates in planning and directing the insurgency. Engraving by Branislaŭ Zalieski. Second half of the 19th century



1863 insurgents' banner bearing the coats of arms of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania (right) and Poland (left) and the inscription *For our freedom and yours*. Czartoryski Museum in Paris

Muscovite slavery. As long as this lies over us, we shall have nothing. There will be no truth, no riches, no learning whatsoever. They will only drive us like cattle not to our well-being, but to our perdition.'

Just before his death, Kastuś Kalinoŭski wrote in prison his only known poem dedicated to his beloved:

Black-browed Maryśka, my little dove,
Where have your happiness and bright future gone?
It's all past and gone, – gone like it never was,
There's just a bitterness in the breast...

At the same time the poem is also a call to the Belarusian people:

Farewell, my peasant people,
Live in happiness, live free.
Recall from time to time your Jaśka
Who perished for the truth and your prosperity.

[Translator's note: The translation of the extracts from Kalinoŭski's writings is taken, slightly adapted, from *The 1863 Uprising in Byelorussia*. Texts and commentaries by Jan Zaprudnik and Thomas Bird. New York, 1980]



Prisoners are fettered *en route* to Siberia. Drawing by Aliaksandr Sachačeŭski, who was sentenced to hard labour after taking part in the insurgency

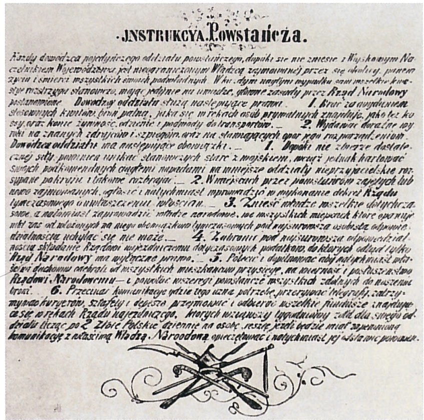
THE UPRISING OF 1863



Bronze medal commemorating the 1863 uprising struck by Charles Wiener. Obverse. 1863

The third insurrection against tsarism in Belarus was prepared by the so-called Lithuanian Provincial Committee. It was influenced by a group of revolutionary democrats from the 'red' camp, and had the task of collecting money, acquiring weapons and training future commanders. Kalinoŭski's newspaper *Mužyckaja Praŭda* was used as a means of rousing the peasants.

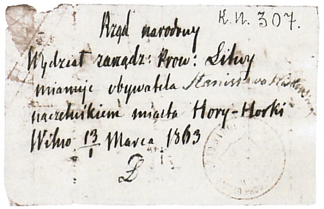
The insurgents' first action took place in Warsaw at night, on 22–23 January. By the evening of the same day news of the armed struggle had reached Vilnia.


JNSTRUKCYA Powstańcza.

Orders for the uprising

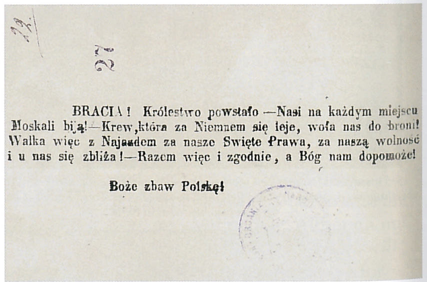


Insurgents leave Horadnia on their way to join the main forces of the insurrection. Lithograph of the second half of the 19th century


Rząd narodowy K. N. 307.
Wydział rządz: Prow: Litwy
mianuje obywatela Stanisława ...
naczelnikiem miasta Hory-Horki
Wilno 13/1 Marca 1863

Order of the Provisional Government appointing Stanislaŭ Viskoŭski as Head of Hory-Horki

Appeal by the command of the insurrection to join the uprising


BRACIA! Królestwo powstało —Nasi na każdym miejscu Moskali biją!—Krew, która za Niemnem się leje, woła nas do broni! Walka więc z Najeźdcem za nasze Święte Prawa, za naszą wolność i u nas się zbliża!—Razem więc i zgodnie, a Bóg nam dopomoże!

Boże zbaw Polskę!

CHRONOLOGY

1 February 1863 – Provisional Government issues a Manifesto calling for an insurrection
13 February 1863 – insurgents seize Pružany
11 March 1863 – command of the insurrection passes to the 'whites'
6 May 1863 – insurgents seize Hory-Horki
21 May 1863 – battle between the insurgents and the tsarist forces at Milavidy
10 February 1864 – Kalinoŭski arrested



Seals of the Provisional Government. Rubbings



Citus Dalieŭski (Tytus Dalewski) (1840–1864). Photograph. 1860



Liudvik Źviaždoŭski (Ludwik Zwierzdowski) (1829–1864). Photograph of the time



Valier Urublieŭski (Walery Wróblewski) (1836–1908). Photograph of the 1860s



Ramuaĺd Traŭhut (Romuald Traugutt) (1826–1864). Photograph of the early 1860s

On 1 February 1863 the Lithuanian Provincial Committee was transformed into a Provisional Government. It promptly issued a Manifesto to all the people of the region declaring the uprising. A few days earlier the first detachments of insurgent troops had already arrived from Poland in the western counties of the Belarusian governorates. Local insurgent units were quickly put together in March and April. In the main they were made up of the nobility, local officials, students and teachers. One fifth of the men were peasants.



Off to join the uprising. Painting by Artur Grottger. 1860s

At the head of the insurgent units were patriots devoted to the ideals of freedom, such as Valier Urublieŭski, Ramuaĺd Trauhut, Liudvik Źviaždoŭski, Ihnat Budzilovič, Fieliks Vislavuch and Citus Dalieŭski.

Insurgents of 1863. Design for uniforms. Drawing by Juliusz Kossak. 1860s







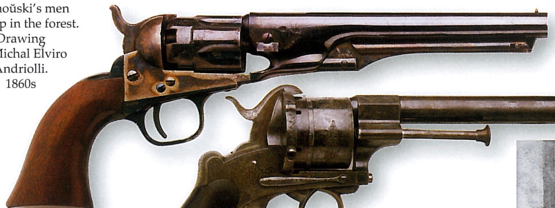
Baliaslaŭ Kalyška,
one of the insurgent commanders.
Engraving by an unknown artist. 1860s

The death of Liudvik Narbut at Dubičy.
Lithograph after a drawing
by Michal Elvira Andriolli. 1864–1865.
Narbut was the commander
of the insurgent forces
in the Lida county; he formed
one of the first insurgent units
in Belarus. It had some successes
in clashes with Russian troops

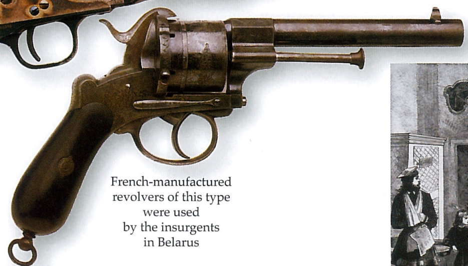


Kalinoŭski's men
at camp in the forest.
Drawing
by Michal Elviro
Andriolli.
1860s

Initially the insurgents met with some success. The unit under Liudvik Źviaždoŭski (Ludwik Zwierzdowski), the commander of the men from the Mahilioŭ governorate, captured the town of Hory-Horki. Other units occupied Pružany and Śvislač. However, the tsarist authorities managed to trick many peasants – especially in eastern Belarus – into believing that 'the Polish lords want to restore serfdom'.



Five-bullet
Colt revolver. 1862



French-manufactured
revolvers of this type
were used
by the insurgents
in Belarus

Belarusian women prepare
medication for the insurgents.
Drawing from a French media outlet. 1863





Banner of an insurgent cavalry brigade.
Museum of the Polish Army in Warsaw



Śraniava coat of arms
used by Arciom
Viaryha-Dareŭski,
Belarusian writer
and participant
in the insurrection of 1863



Baliaslaŭ
Śviatarecki
(Bolesław
Świętorzecki),
insurgent military
commander
of the Miensk
Palatinate.
Photograph
of the 1860s



Edmund Viaryha,
associate
of Kalinoŭski
and member
of the Lithuanian
Provincial
Committee.
Photograph
of the late
19th century



Insurgents do battle with punitive units. Drawing of the early 20th century

Insurgent military hospital.
Drawing from a French
media outlet. 1863



The 'white' camp was also afraid of a general uprising against serfdom. They would have been satisfied if foreign states had helped them restore the Commonwealth within the frontiers of 1772. The 'whites' were categorically opposed to the plans of Kalinoŭski and his associates to introduce a new democratic order, in which society would not be divided into different classes and land would be transferred to those who worked on it. Within the first month of the insurrection the 'whites' had already succeeded in replacing the revolutionary Provisional Government with their own Department for the Government of the Provinces of Lithuania, and in appointing commissars for each of the governorates.



Scythemen clash
with tsarist infantry.
Drawing of the time



Insurgent faces a Russian firing squad. Drawing of 1863



Jakub Hiejštar (Gieysztor), representative of the 'white' party. In February 1863 he headed the Department for the Government of the Provinces of Lithuania. Photograph of the 1860s



Aliaksandr Askierka, one of the leaders of the 'whites'. 1880s



Medal struck in honour of the uprising by medallier Charles Wiener. Bronze. Reverse. 1863

By May the tsarist forces had already crushed the rebellion in the governorates of eastern Belarus. Almost all the insurgent units in the Miensk governorate were destroyed. It was only in the Horadnia region that the insurgency was able to keep going, out of reach of the Tsar's punitive batallions. This was largely due to the greater level of support that the insurgents received from the peasants. It was near the village of Milavidy in the Slonim county that the biggest battle was fought; a chapel commemorating the event stands there to this day. Under pressure from well-armed and trained regular troops the insurgents retreated from Slonim towards Vaŭkavysk, where they were wiped out in June. At the beginning of the summer the direction of the insurrection had once again passed into the hands of the 'reds'. Kastuś Kalinoŭski soon came to head the Provisional Government, now renamed the Executive Department for Lithuania. He and his supporters devoted themselves entirely to the task of trying to persuade the peasants to join the uprising and of making the local revolutionary committees more effective. By this time, however, the uprising was already doomed to failure.

Mikhail Murav'ev, the Tsar's cruel and cunning satrap, was put in charge of suppressing the liberation movement. He was dubbed the 'Hangman' in recognition of his blood-soaked 'achievements'. He used every means available to achieve his goal: bribery and deception, signing death warrants and ordering graves to be flooded with excrement to prevent their being used as sites for patriotic demonstrations. Even so, battles continued to be fought in the west of Belarus right up to the end of 1863.

The history of the 19th century does not have many examples of an uprising in which what was essentially a handful of armed individuals rose up against a mighty empire in defence of their human dignity and national honour, but the uprising of 1863 certainly was one. Three European nations – Belarusians, *Lietuviai* and Poles – lost their finest sons in the fight against the feudalism, absolutism and despotism of the Russians for a constitutional, parliamentary form of government.



Cossack punitive unit at bivouac. Engraving of the 1860s

The total number of insurgents killed in the 'North-Western Territory' is unknown. The number of those punished by field courts martial or without any form of trial amounted to 18,500. 128 of them were hanged or shot, 853 sent off to hard labour, and around 12,000 sentenced to terms of exile or service in punishment batallions.

The uprising had drowned in blood, but at least it forced the authorities to make significant concessions to the Belarusian peasantry in the way the 1861 reforms were applied to the area.



En route to Siberia. Drawing by an unknown insurgent, sentenced to hard labour

At the same time a number of emergency laws came into force in the Belarusian governorates, all of them aimed at total Russification. Ownership of land was transferred to Russians on a grand scale and a large number of Russian civil servants were brought in. The local nobility were 'dealt with' and deprived of their rights. The laws enshrined in the Statute of the Grand Duchy Lithuania had already been abolished. After having closed the University of Vilnia, the authorities closed the agricultural institute in Hory-Horki in 1864. The Belarusian governorates were not granted the right to elected assemblies (*ziemstvy*), elected justices of the peace or self-government for the nobility. Thousands of Belarusian Uniates, who had adhered to their ancestors' faith despite the abolition of the Church Union in 1839, were forcibly joined with the Russian Orthodox Church. There were numerous restrictions placed on the rights of Belarusian Catholics, Poles and Jews.

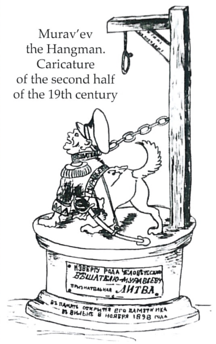
There were many among the insurgents who were fighting for Belarus rather than for the Commonwealth. They had their Belarusian newspaper and in their ranks were the Belarusian writers Francišak Bahuševič and Vincent Dunin-Marcinkievič. This greatly alarmed the tsarist authorities who further intensified the suppression of national sentiment.

Sunday in a Siberian mine. Painting by Jacek Malczewski. 1882



Tsarist policy in Belarus was completely colonial in its nature.

Murav'ev the Hangman. Caricature of the second half of the 19th century



THE BELARUSIAN NARODNIKI



Seal
of the underground
organisation
Land and Liberty.
Rubbing

Here are the names of just some of the most well-known figures from the Belarusian governorates who were active in the *narodnik* movement:
Mikalaj Sudziloŭski,
Ryhor Isajeŭ,
Gesia Helfmann,
Anton Barejša,
Anatoĺ Bonč-Asmaloŭski,
Jazep Lukaševič.

The savage repression of the 1863–1864 uprising and the imposition of emergency laws in the aftermath severely held back the Belarusian national liberation movement. It did not make any impact again until the second half of the 1870s.

This was a time when, under the influence of the writings of Alexander Herzen, Nikolai Chernyshevskii and Mikhail Bakunin, the *narodnik* movement was beginning to spread throughout the Russian Empire. The *narodniki* were mainly members of the intelligentsia who believed that by 'going to the people' (*narod*) they could stir up a general revolt against tsarism.

One of the first *narodniki* groups in Belarus was established in Mahilioŭ in 1875 by students of the boys' grammar school and the theological seminary. Other groups soon became active in Miensk, Horadnia, Viciebsk, Slucak, Vorša, Pinsk and Hory-Horki.

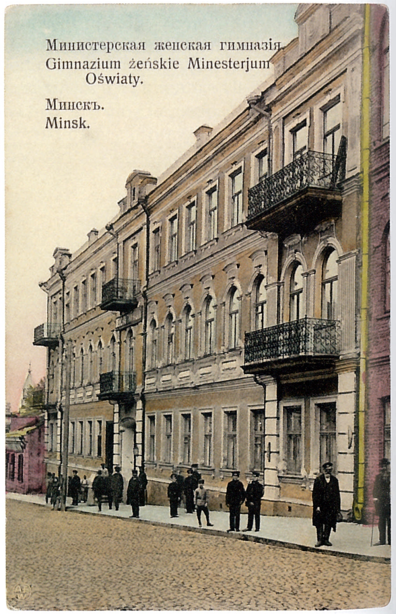
In 1879 the all-Russian national organisation *Land and Liberty* split into two parties: *Black Repartition*, which continued to adhere to the principle of simply spreading propaganda, and *People's Will*, a group which brought together the advocates of using terror as a means of spreading their message. By 1880 most Belarusian *narodniki* were supporters of *People's Will*, which was by now concentrating its efforts on planning the assassination of Tsar Alexander II. They believed that this would serve as the signal for a popular uprising throughout the Russian Empire.



Ryhor Isajeŭ, a Belarusian who was involved in the plot to assassinate Alexander II. Photograph of the early 1880s



Mikalaj Sudziloŭski, a *narodnik* who went on to become active in the international revolutionary movement under the pseudonym Nicholas Russel. He was renowned for his expertise in a wide range of scientific disciplines and, in 1901, was elected President of the Senate of the Hawaiian Republic. Photograph of the 1920s



Miensk grammar school for girls. *Narodnik* ideas were popular among the students of such schools and universities. Postcard of the early 20th century

CHRONOLOGY

1855–1881 – life of Ihnat Hryniavicki
13 March 1881 – Hryniavicki assassinates Alexander II
1884 – publication of *Gomon* (Hubbub), journal of the Belarusian fraction of *People's Will*



Ihnat Hryniavicki, the Belarusian who assassinated Alexander II. Photograph of the late 1870s

The death sentence passed by *People's Will* on Alexander II was carried out by a Belarusian from a noble family background, Ihnat Hryniavicki.

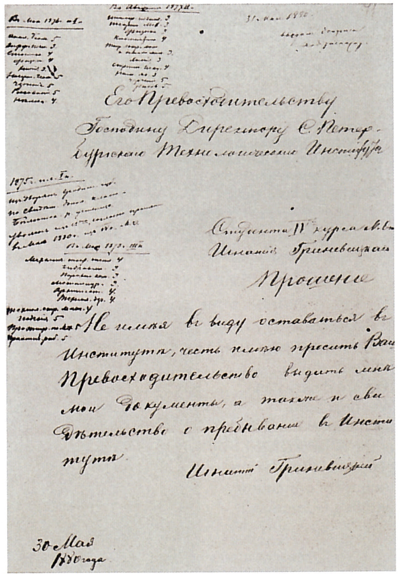
The 'death sentence' was carried out by a Belarusian, Ihnat Hryniavicki. He had shown considerable ability as a student at the Technological Institute in St Petersburg, and seemed to have a bright career and a peaceful, independent life ahead of him, but he chose a different path. He joined *People's Will* in 1879 and played an active role in revolutionary circles. Hryniavicki collected money for the support of political prisoners and distributed underground publications. He also worked in the so-called 'divine chancellery', an establishment for the production of the kind of forged documents that revolutionaries needed. At the same time he belonged to a terrorist group that was keeping a close watch on the Tsar's movements.

On the day before the assassination was due to take place Hryniavicki drew up his last will and testament. In it he wrote, 'Alexander II must die. His days are numbered. Only the future can tell whether it is I or someone else who is destined to strike the final blow that will resound over the whole of Russia... What will happen then? How many more sacrifices must our unhappy, beloved country demand of its sons and daughters for it to be free?'

After he had exploded his bomb on the Catherine Canal in St Petersburg Ihnat Hryniavicki survived the Tsar by only a few hours. The killing of the Tsar did not result in any serious unrest among the people. The new Emperor Alexander III embarked upon a quite blatantly reactionary internal policy and put a stop to the liberal vacillations of his predecessor.

Bomb explodes on 13 March 1881 on the Catherine Canal in St Petersburg. Drawing of the time





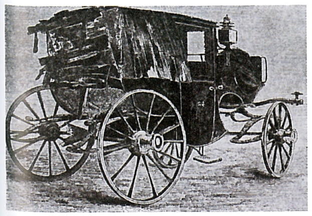
Его Превосходительству
Господину Директору С. Петер-
бургского Технологического Института

Студента IV курса
Игнатий Гриневицкий
Прошение

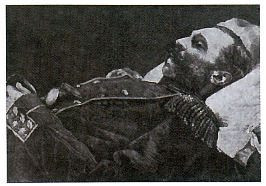
Не имея в виду оставаться в Институте, честь имею просить Ваше Превосходительство выдать мне мои документы, а также и свидетельство о пребывании в Институте.
Игнатий Гриневицкий

30 Мая 1880 года

Hryniavicki's statement to the Director of the St Petersburg Technological Institute, declaring his intention to abandon his studies. 30 May 1880



Alexander II's carriage after the explosion of the first *People's Will* bomb. 13 March 1881. Engraving of the time



Alexander II. Deathbed photograph

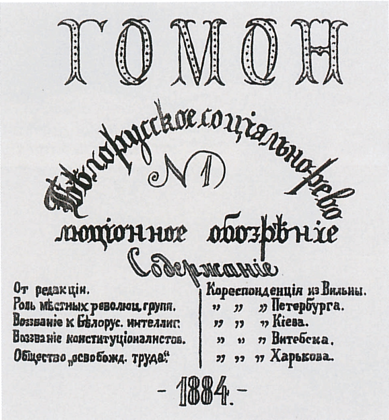
Belarusian Siarhiej Kavalik was one of the leaders of the *narodnik* movement in Russia in the 1870s. Photograph of the time





Gesia Helfmann from Mazyr, activist of *People's Will*. Photograph of the early 1880s

First number of *Gomon* (Hubbub), the underground hectographed journal of the Belarusian fraction of *People's Will*



ГОМОН

Бѣлорусское соціально-революціонное обозрѣніе

№ 1

Содержаніе

От редакціи.	Кореспонденція из Вильны.
Роль мѣстных революц. групп.	" " " Петербурга.
Воззваніе к Бѣлорус. интеллиг.	" " " Кіева.
Воззваніе конституціоналистов.	" " " Витебска.
Общество „освобожд. труда"	" " " Харькова.

- 1884 -

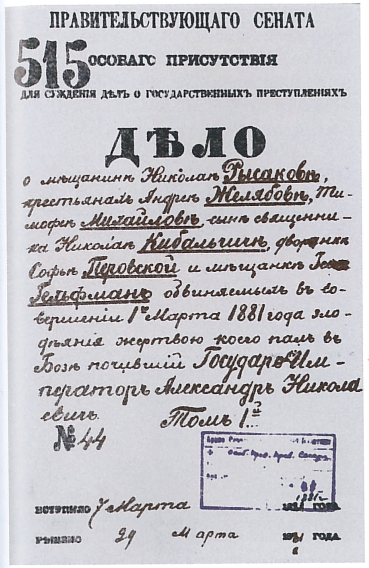
Two issues of a hectographed underground journal called *Gomon* (Hubbub) appeared in 1884. Its publishers, a group of *narodnik* students from Belarus, referred to Hryniavicki as 'one of the fervent founders of [their] fraction'. The material published in *Gomon* put forward the revolutionary democratic case for the existence of a Belarusian nation and for its autonomy once the tsarist system had been destroyed.

The first issue of *Gomon* stated unequivocally, 'We are Belarusians. We must fight for the local interests of the Belarusian people and for the autonomy of our country within a federation.'



People's Will groups were active in many Belarusian towns. Horadnia at the end of the 19th century. Postcard of the time

Court papers for the trial of those accused of carrying out the death sentence on Alexander II



ПРАВИТЕЛЬСТВУЮЩАГО СЕНАТА

515 ОСОБАГО ПРИСУТСТВІЯ

ДЛЯ СУЖДЕНІЯ ДѢЛЪ О ГОСУДАРСТВЕННЫХЪ ПРЕСТУПЛЕНІЯХЪ

ДѢЛО

о мѣщанинѣ Николаѣ Рысаковѣ, крестьянинѣ Андреѣ Желябовѣ, Тимофеѣ Михайловѣ, сынѣ священника Николаѣ Кибальчичѣ, дворянкѣ Софьѣ Перовской и мѣщанкѣ Гесѣ Гельфманъ обвиняемыхъ въ совершеніи 1го Марта 1881 года злодѣянія жертвою коего палъ въ Бозѣ почившій Государь Императоръ Александръ Николаевичъ. Томъ 1.

№ 44

вступило 7 Марта

рѣшено 29 Марта 1881 года

Sofia Perovskaia was involved in the plot to assassinate Alexander II. Photograph of the late 1870s



Mikalaj Zabela, *People's Will* activist from the Mahilioŭ area. Photograph of the early 1880s



The publishers of *Gomon* held the view that the national intelligentsia should not limit themselves to studying their country and to cultural activities; given the nature of the tsarist regime this would be entirely pointless. What was needed was a political struggle.

'The fact that the people have no faith in their own strength, or that a national movement has not taken root in the masses ought not to be taken as a sign that they are submerged in some kind of age-old state of passivity,' wrote the *Gomon* authors in calling on Belarusians to fight for their social and national ideals. The journal reminded its readers of the struggle of the Belarusian Orthodox fraternities against forced conversion to Catholicism, and of the mighty peasant rebellions against serfdom and the uprisings of 1831 and 1863.

Belarus was on the threshold of a new stage in its fight for freedom.



Building of the Civic Assembly in Miensk. It was here that the Miensk Association of Amateurs of the Fine Arts, founded by the liberal intelligentsia, held its first meetings. The Association's members soon found themselves on the list of 'undesirables'. Postcard of the early 20th century

THE BELARUSIAN NATION



By the end of the 18th century, after the three partitions of the Commonwealth, all the territories settled by Belarusians had been incorporated into the Russian Empire. Most of them lived in the governorates of Viciebsk, Mahilioŭ, Miensk, Horadnia, Viĺnia and Smaliensk. The overwhelming majority of Belarusians (up to 95%) lived in rural areas and belonged to the peasant class. Jews were predominant in the cities and towns.

Liera (hurdy-gurdy) – an old Belarusian musical instrument. 1809



This is how Mahilioŭ looked at the turn of the 19th century. Postcard of the time



Young ladies in fashionable attire. Photograph from the collection of the former Ivan Luckievič Museum in Viĺnia

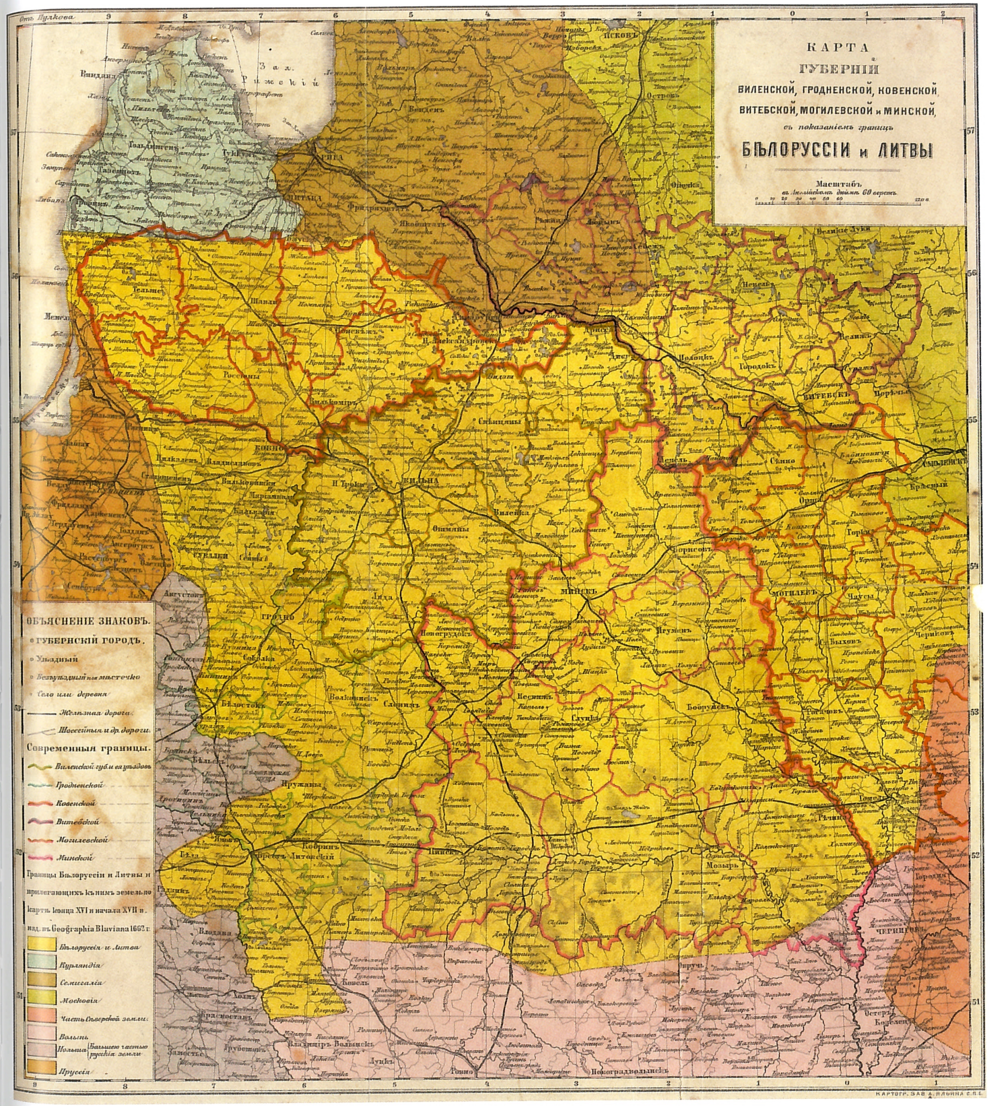


Town of Hlybokaje. Postcard dating from the First World War

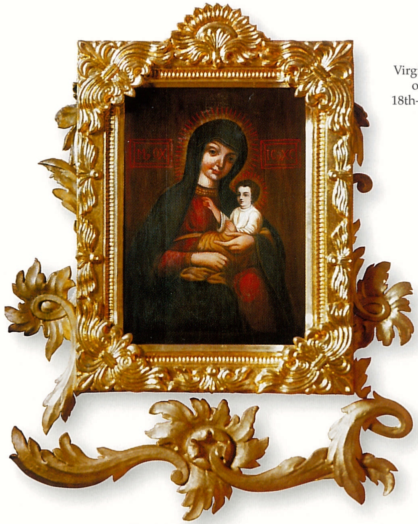


Boy on a tricycle. Photograph. 1901

According to the 1897 census only 14.5% of urban dwellers were Belarusian (by mother tongue). At the same time 86,000 members of the gentry class (more than 50%) stated that Belarusian was their first language, as did 60% of teachers, 40% of civil servants, 30% of postal and telegraph workers and 20% of medical staff. Given the ongoing intense Russification, these figures show the considerable growth of national identity.



Map of the governorates of Viĺnia, Viciebsk, Horadnia, Koŭna (Kaunas), Mahilioŭ and Miensk, *ie* almost all of the ethnic Belarusian territories. Late 19th century



Virgin and Child
of Baruny.
18th-century icon

Education and culture were subjected to a policy of total Russification. All university-level institutions had been closed.

An important feature of the Belarusians as an ethnic group was their division on the basis of religious adherence into Orthodox and Catholics. This was very useful for furthering Russification and Polonisation policies: the Orthodox would be registered as 'Russians' and the Catholics as 'Poles'. Once the Church Union had been abolished and the Uniates herded forcibly into the State Church, most Belarusians professed Orthodoxy. By 1897 the figure had reached 80%.

The French Revolution was of great importance in establishing most European nations. However, the feudal Russian Empire defeated France in the years 1812–1815. The result was that Russia retained serfdom for a further 50 years and so lagged further and further behind the West.



Group of officers
and ladies in a car
near Miensk.
Photograph.
1916



*Litvin girl
with willow fronds.*
Painting
by Kanut Rusiecki.
1847

Genealogical tree of the ancient Belarusian family of Vajnilovič.
Bronze. Early 20th century





Tanners from Davyd-Haradok.
Photograph by Michal Zubiej
from Michaś Ramaniuk's
collection. Early 20th century

The policies pursued by the Russian autocratic government in Belarus were of a blatantly colonial nature. In the economy this could be seen in the wholesale transfer of land and Belarusian serfs to Russian landowners and in the exploitation of those who worked on the land. Townspeople and peasants alike faced a heavy burden of taxes and other duties. The economy of Belarusian towns in the 1830s was in a catastrophic state: the income which Prince Paskevich received from just his Homieĺ estate was two-and-a-half times higher than the total combined income being brought in from the towns of Miensk, Viciebsk, Mahilioŭ, Horadnia, Polacak, Bieraście, Pinsk and Babrujsk.



Windmill not far from Kliecak.
Photograph of the 1980s



Fair in Pinsk.
Early
20th-century
photograph



Mummers
from near Škloŭ.
Early
20th-century
photograph



Girls from Palieśsie
with distaffs.
Early 20th-century
photograph
from Michaś
Ramaniuk's
collection



Postcard commemorating the inauguration of driving in Slucak. 1910s



Maiden reaping. Painting by Kanut Rusiecki. 1844



Voŭčyn parish council on a photograph taken by the cantor Ściapan Charlamaŭ. From Michaś Ramaniuk's collection

The existence of an independent Belarusian ethnic group was discussed and justified on theoretical grounds as a 'distinct branch of the Slavs' for the first time in the hectographed underground journal *Gomon* (Hubbub).

The region's greatest source of wealth was the land and its natural resources. These assets belonged to the landowners who, depending on their sense of national allegiance, were either Russians or Poles. By the beginning of the 1860s they held in their hands more than 80% of the region's manufacturing capacity. The abolition of serfdom led to the growth of an industrial middle class made up primarily of Jewish merchants and traders. By 1897 some 300,000 people in Belarus were engaged in manufacturing or trade, with no connection whatsoever to agriculture. Of this figure Belarusians comprised 17%, Poles and Russians 10% each and Jews 60%. The composition of the urban middle class and the working class by nationality was roughly the same. The 1897 census shows that only 1.7% of the merchants in the 'North-Western Territory' were Belarusian (by language), whereas 85% were Jews.



Silver medal of the Vilnia Agricultural Society. Reverse



Malaryta area festive folk costumes from the village of Makrany. Drawing by Michaś Ramaniuk. 1995

Chests were to be found in almost every peasant cottage. They were used for storing the family's most valuable possessions and clothing. Photograph by Michaś Ramaniuk





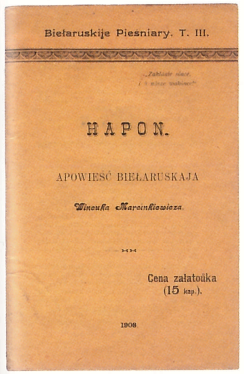
Belarusian dulcimer

It is therefore abundantly clear that agriculture, industry and trade were dominated by non-Belarusians. The social support base for the Belarusian national movement comprised the peasantry, part of the gentry and the small segment of the working class in urban areas that had managed to preserve their native language. In the 19th century it was mainly among the Catholic gentry class that a Belarusian national intelligentsia began to evolve.

The modern Belarusian literary language emerged in the first half of the 19th century. The process was stimulated by the long poems *Aeneid turned inside out* and *Taras on Parnassus*, attributed to Vikient Ravinski and Kanstancin Vieranicyn respectively, as well as by the writers Jan Barščeŭski, Jan Čačot and Vincent Dunin-Marcinkievič. Kastuś Kalinoŭski contributed greatly to the development of journalism with his *Mužyckaja Praŭda* and *Letters from beneath the gallows*.



Folk musical instruments: bagpipes, hurdy-gurdy and horns


Bielaruskije Piesniary. T. III.

HAPON.

APOWIEŚĆ BIELARUSKAJA

Cena załatoŭka (15 kap.).

1908

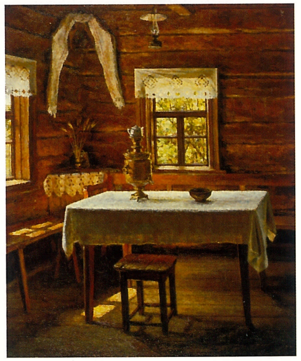
St Petersburg edition of Vincent Dunin-Marcinkievič's *Hapon*. 1908



Belarusian women's dress

Village woman in festive dress. Photograph by Michaś Ramaniuk. 1960s



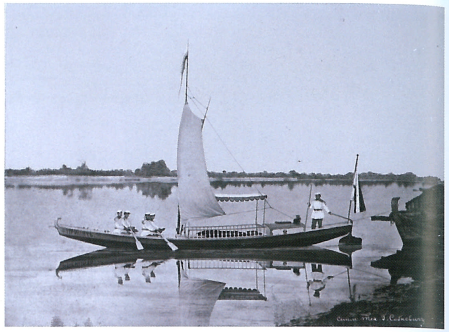


Pokuć of a Belarusian peasant cottage. This is where the icons hung, and where a cloth-covered table stood at which honoured guests would be seated

Given that there was a virtual ban on printing in Belarusian before 1905, publications from other countries that were free of any censorship restrictions played an important part in the development of modern Belarusian literature. The books by the prominent Belarusian writer at the 19th century Francišak Bahuševič were pulished outside the Russian Empire.

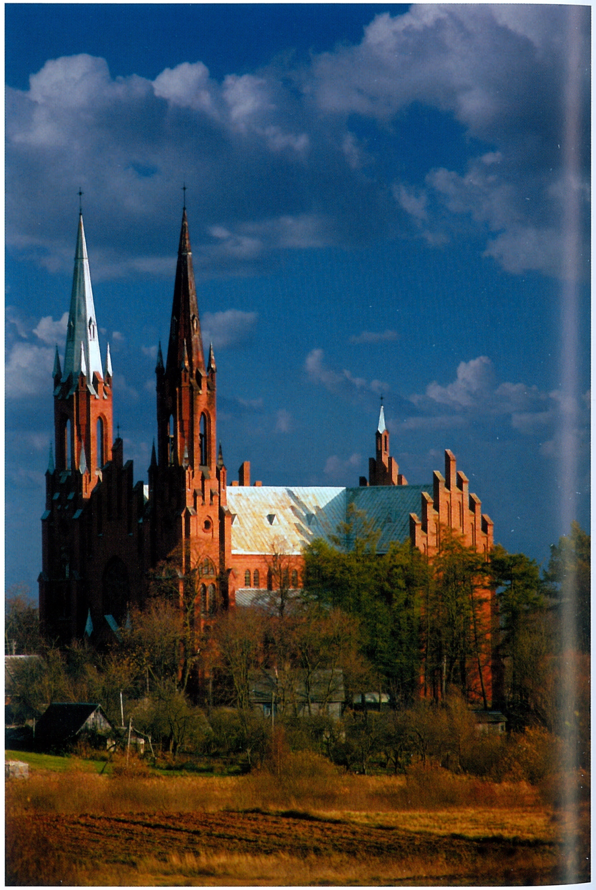


Bieraście icon
of the Mother of God.
17th century



'Gondolas'
used for boating trips
on the Prypiać river.
Photograph
by H. Sabkievič.
Early 20th century

Church
of the Holy Trinity
in Vidzy, Braslaŭ district.
Neo-Gothic. 1914.
Photograph
by Anatol Kliaščuk



From 1855 on the Belarusian national movement, which had hitherto been primarily cultural, was beginning to acquire political overtones. On the very eve of the insurrection of 1863 Kalinoŭski had insisted that Vilnia should be on an equal footing with Warsaw; he had set out a demand for the creation of a republic that would be independent of Poland. In the end, however, he was obliged to submit to the national government in Warsaw, which uttered only the most nebulous promises of autonomy for 'all the fraternal nations'.

By the end of the 1870s and the beginning of the 1880s students from Belarus at university-level institutions in St Petersburg had published illegally a number of political pamphlets, such as *Da bielaruskaj moladzi* (To the young people of Belarus), *Da bielaruskaj intelihiencyi* (To the intelligentsia of Belarus) and *Paslańnie da ziemliakoŭ-bielarusaŭ ad 'Ščyraha Bielarusa'* (Letter to my fellow countrymen from a 'true Belarusian').

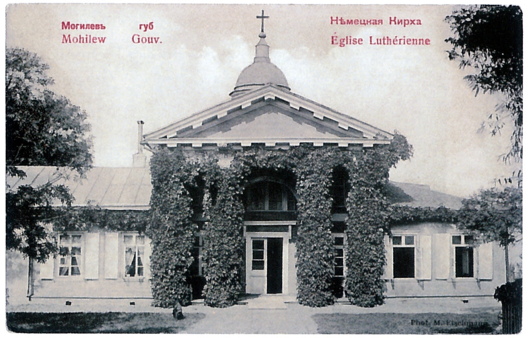


Shop in Liozna.
By Marc Chagall.
1914

These publications all stressed the unity felt by the Belarusian nation and their awareness of their own interests, which differed from those of the 'Poles and Russians'. The appeal *To the young people of Belarus* declared the legitimate right of the Belarusian people to an equal and independent place in the 'family of Slavonic nations'.

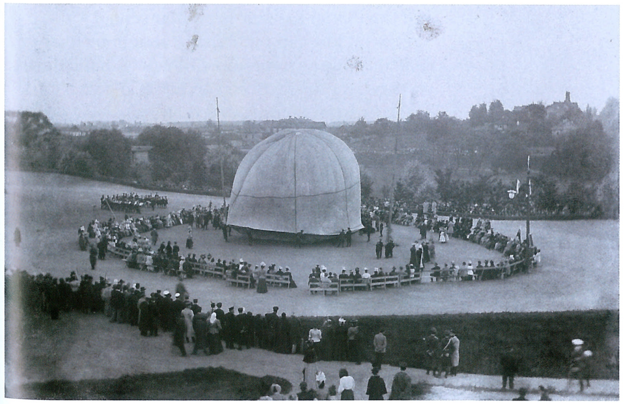


Tatar mosque in Miensk.
Early 20th-century postcard



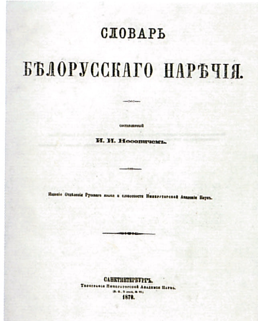
Mahilioŭ.
Lutheran chapel.
Early
20th-century
postcard

Preparing a hot-air balloon for flight.
Governor's Garden in Miensk. August 1899





Jews had lived side-by-side
with Belarusians for centuries.
This is a parchment Torah
scroll of the Pentateuch,
the Five Books of Moses.
19th century. Polacak

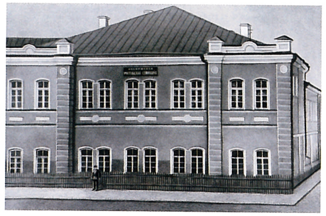


Dictionary of Ivan Nasovič. 1870

THE CULTURE OF BELARUS IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY

Education and science

Following the suppression of the 1863 uprising the colonial authorities once and for all deprived Belarus of any form of higher education. In response to the active participation of teachers and students in the armed struggle against tsarism the Agricultural Institute in Hory-Horki was closed, along with the grammar schools in Navahradak, Śvislač and Maladziečna, and another five middle schools in the region covered by the Vilnia Education Authority. The Belarusian language was banned from schools.


Teacher training college in Niaśviž. Many important figures in Belarusian culture studied here at various times, including the ethnographer and folklorist Adam Bahdanovič, the poet Jakub Kolas and the novelist Kuźma Čorny. Photograph of the early 20th century



Boys' grammar school in Hubiernatarskaja (Governor) Street in Miensk. Postcard of the early 20th century



Teacher training college in Polacak. It prepared teachers mainly for the Vilnia Education Authority. Among its graduates were the poet Janka Žurba, historian and literary critic Danila Vasilieŭski and the Latvian journalist Juris Krejtz. Postcard of the early 20th century

The purpose of the educational system in the 'North-Western Territory' was to Russify the pupils and educate them in the spirit of Monarchism, Orthodoxy and Russianness.

People in both Russia and Western Europe began to pay more attention to Belarus as a result of the national liberation uprising led by Kalinoŭski.

The government now chiefly relied on the parish schools. They came under the authority of the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church and followed a very limited curriculum. Teachers for these elementary schools were trained in special colleges in Polacak, Maladziečna, Śvislač and Niaśviž. These colleges accepted only students who were Orthodox by religion. Even so they did not provide a secondary education and their graduates were not qualified for further study. The government's Russification policy was also aided by four theological seminaries and the Polacak Cadet Corps which had been set up after the closure of the Polacak Academy and the Piarist Fathers' grammar school.


Juĺian Kračkoŭski, Belarusian folklorist, ethnographer, lecturer at the teacher training college in Polacak, father of the well-known Orientalist Ihnat Kračkoŭski. Photograph of the 1880s

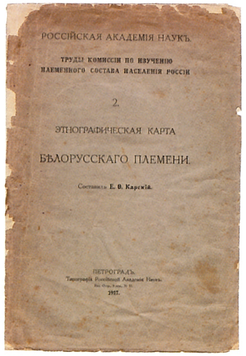
Official Russian scholarship sought by every available means to promote the view that Belarus was and always had been an integral part of the Russian Empire, and that Belarusians were simply the western branch of the 'Russian people'. The creation in 1867 of the North-Western Section of the Russian Geographical Association was intended to put this government policy into practice. Among the scholars who played an active role in the work of the Section were the ethnographers Paviel Šejn and Juĺian Kračkoŭski, Aliaksandr Siemiantoŭski and Jeŭdakim Ramanaŭ.

CHRONOLOGY

6 July 1851 – 16 July 1897 – life and work of Janka Lučyna
10 February 1868 – 26 May 1918 – life and work of Karuś Kahaniec
25 January 1869 – 4 February 1894 – life and work of Adam Hurynovič
1870 – publication of Ivan Nasovič's *Dictionary of the Belarusian tongue*

Jaŭchim Karski, the founder of Belarusian linguistics. In his work he attempted to define the ethnic boundaries of the Belarusian people. Photograph of the 1890s






Paviel Šejn, folklorist and ethnographer. He compiled an anthology of more than 1,000 Belarusian folk songs. Photograph of the 1890s

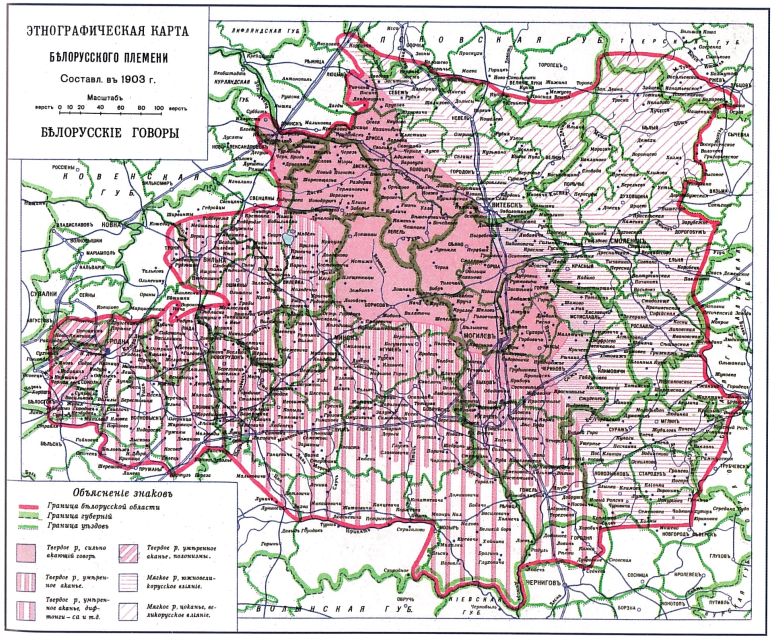
They embarked upon an important programme of research into the language, folklore, customs and rituals, and material culture of the Belarusian people.

Between the years 1887 and 1903 Šejn published the three volumes of his *Materials for the study of the life and language of the people of the North-Western Territory of Russia*. Despite the fact that the institution in which Šejn worked had been created to prove that the Belarusians were actually Russians, the materials that he and other scholars collected clearly demonstrated that an independent Belarusian nation really did exist.

There were others who did a great deal to advance the study of Belarusian ethnography, *eg* Mikalaj Jančuk, Mitrafan Doŭnar-Zapoĺski, Jaŭchim Karski and Michal Fiedaroŭski (Michał Federowski). Fiedaroŭski, for example, collected 5,000 Belarusian folk songs, some 10,000 proverbs and sayings, hundreds of stories and riddles.


Jeŭdakim Ramanaŭ. The ten issues of his *Belarusian anthology* brought together his most important studies of Belarusian folklore and ethnography. Photograph of the early 20th century

This is the map compiled by Jaŭchim Karski. It does not cover the whole of the ethnic territory of the Belarusians. In fact it is more linguistic than ethnographic; it takes no account of other ethnographic features, or of aspects of material and spiritual culture, or indeed of common history of the Belarusian people as a whole. All these factors were later taken into account on the map designed by the historian Mitrafan Doŭnar-Zapoĺski. 1903




Michal Fiedaroŭski, ethnographer, folklorist and archaeologist. Photograph of the 1890s

Ivan Nasovič made a very special contribution to Belarusian culture. He published several collections of Belarusian proverbs, sayings and riddles; his *Dictionary of the Belarusian tongue*, containing more than 30,000 words, appeared in St Petersburg in 1870.



Jan Karlovič (Karłowicz), linguist, ethnographer and musicologist. Photograph of the 1880s

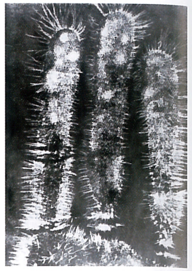
Uladzimir Kavalieŭski, Belarusian, founder of evolutionary palaeontology. Photograph of the 1880s



Jakub Narkievič-Jodka, prominent scientist and doctor. Photograph of 1888



Electrographic print of a human hand, made by Jakub Narkievič-Jodka



The historian, publisher and public figure Adam Kirkor produced two books – *Lithuanian Palieśsie* and *Belarusian Palieśsie* – that gave scholars in both Russia and Poland an opportunity to discover for themselves the history and culture, both spiritual and material, of the Belarusians. The historian and anthropologist Aliaksiej Sapunoŭ made an invaluable contribution to the study of the Belarusians living along the river Dźvina by publishing the three volumes of archival documents under the title *Viciebsk antiquities in the years 1883–1888.* Five years later he published his groundbreaking study *The Western Dźvina river: a historical and geographical survey*.

The scientific and medical work of Jakub Narkievič-Jodka was widely recognised throughout Europe. He constructed a weather station on his estate, worked out ways of calculating the potential of atmospheric electricity and designed apparatus for the wireless reception of electromagnetic signals. He opened a sanatorium on his estate and successfully applied his own methods of using electricity in diagnosis and treatment.



Belarusian distaffs were noted for the richness and variety of their decoration. From Michaś Ramaniuk's collection

Many Belarusian scholars and scientists were compelled to put their talent to the service of other nations. Among them we find the geologist and national hero of Chile Ihnat Damiejka, the explorers of Siberia Jan Čerski and Bieniadykt Dyboŭski, the mathematician Sofja Kavalieŭskaja (Korvin-Krukoŭskaja) and the founder of evolutionary palaeontology Uladzimir Kavalieŭski.



Belarus. Map of folk costumes by Michaś Ramaniuk

Literature and art

One of the well-known Belarusian poets of this period was Janka Lučyna (pseudonym of Ivan Niesluchoŭski). Descended from an old Belarusian noble family, he graduated from the Technological Institute in St Petersburg and worked as an engineer. He began writing in Russian and Polish, but switched to Belarusian after seeing a Ukrainian theatrical company on tour in Miensk. It was not until after Lučyna's death that the Belarusian student group in St Petersburg managed to publish a collection of his verse entitled *Viazanka* (A bundle). Even then they had to pretend to the censorship committee that the poems were written in Bulgarian.

Adam Hurynovič also came from a family of the nobility. While studying at the Technological institute in St Petersburg he joined a conspiratorial student organisation made up of young people from Belarus, *Lietuva* and Poland. Hurynovič soon came to be in charge of the organisation. He was arrested and soon died of small pox. All his poetical works were left behind in manuscript and remained unpublished until 1921.

The writer Karuś Kahaniec (pseudonym of Kazimir Kastravicki) was a true son of the 1863 insurgent. He came from the same Belarusian noble family that also gave the world the famous French poet Guillaume Apollinaire – Vilhielm Albiert Uladzimir Apalinar Kastravicki (Wilhelm Albert Włodzimierz Apolinary Kostrowicki). Kazimir was born in Siberia where his father was serving a term of exile. His works are deeply imbued with the ideas of national revival. He popularised the past of Belarus, striving thereby to rekindle the historical memory of the Belarusians people and so reawaken their sense of national honour and dignity. In his poem *Naš symbol* (Our symbol) Kahaniec proclaims:

For our native country, our customs and language,
For our faith stand firm!
Be faithful to your word,
Stand always firm with God!

Karuś Kahaniec, writer and artist, son of a combatant in the 1863 uprising. Illuminated photograph. 1910



The period from 1860 to the end of the century was the hardest time in the history of Belarusian literature. The extreme difficulties arose from the tsarist policy of Russification, the total ban on publishing in Belarusian, and Murav'ev's savage repression both of those who had participated in the uprising and of the intelligentsia in general. Not a single piece of writing in Belarusian appeared in the censored Russian press between the years 1863 and 1888. Vincent Dunin-Marcinkievič, Alhierd Abuchovič, Anton Liavicki (Jadvihin Š.) and Fieliks Tapčeŭski all wrote in Belarusian but had no opportunity to publish their works.



Adam Hurynovič. The poet's works were first published almost 30 years after his death. Photograph of the 1890s



Vinceś Karatynski, writer and journalist. Photograph of the 1880s

In the preface to his first book *Dudka bielaruskaja* (Belarusian pipe) Francišak Bahuševič declares with pride that there is indeed a Belarusian language, 'for the masters as well as the common folk, just like French, or German or any other'.



Poet Janka Lučyna. Photograph of the 1890s. From the collection of the Ivan Luckievič Belarusian Museum in Vilnia



Famous Polish writer Eliza Ažeška (Orzeszkowa), who spent most of her life in Belarus. Belarus occupies a large place in her work. Photograph of the 1880s



Jadvihin Š. (Anton Liavicki), author of allegorical tales distinguished by the perfection of their language and form as well as by their humour and political satire. Photograph of the early 20th century

The harsh Russification policies pursued by the tsarist government effectively blocked the development of a professional Belarusian theatre. In 1892 a group of Belarusian intellectuals from the small town of Radaškavičy attempted to stage in Belarusian the play *Zlodziej* (The thief) by Jadvihin Š. The production was banned by the authorities when it was at the dress rehearsal stage.

Apalinar Haraŭski. *Evening in the Miensk Governorate*. 1870s





Mikadzim Silivanovič. *Old shepherd*. 1860s



Artist Fierdynand Ruščyc (Ferdynand Ruszczyc). Drawing after an early 20th-century photograph

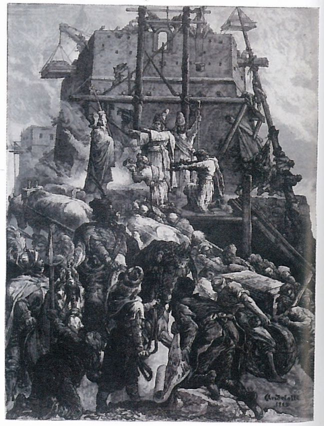
A number of artists who came from Belarus produced work of distinction. Among them were Apalinar Haraŭski, Mikadzim Silivanovič, Kazimir Aĺchimovič, Hienrych Viejsienhof, Januar Suchadoĺski and Ivan Chrucki.



Fierdynand Ruščyc. *The Land*. 1898

The pictorial arts did not suffer from such powerful pressure, but – given that there was as yet no complete sense of Belarusian nationhood – a specifically Belarusian school of painting was still being established at the time.

Michal Eĺvira Andriolli. *Building the Castle of Hiedzimin in Viĺnia*. 1882



Januar Suchadoĺski, painter of battle scenes. Drawing by Maksymilian Fajans. 1850s.

(right) Januar Suchadoĺski. *The Battle of Somosierra*. 1860





Talented painters who came from Belarus received their training elsewhere, most frequently at the Art Academy of St Petersburg, and then went on to perfect their artistry in Western Europe.

The landscape painter and portraitist Apalinar Haraŭski (Apollinary Goravsky) occupies a prominent place in the history of Belarusian culture. Among his best canvasses are *Evening in Miensk Governorate*, *The Biarezina river*, *Śvislač*, and *In the Motherland*. The Belarusian Mikadzim Silivanovič, academician of the St Petersburg Art Academy, is best known for the mosaics in St Isaac's Cathedral in the capital of the Russian Empire. However, he also left colourful pictures that are closely linked, thematically and in imagery, with Belarus: the *Old shepherd*, *Children in the farmyard*, *Off to school, etc.* Kazimir Aĺchimovič, a participant in the 1863 uprising, was a proficient painter of historical scenes (*Burial of Hiedzimin*, *The death of Hlinski in prison*, *After the battle*) and also illustrated the works of Adam Mickievič.

The culture of Belarus was gathering strength for the national reawakening that was to come at the beginning of the 20th century.



Vincent Dmachoŭski (Wincenty Dmochowski). *Forest fire*. 1850

Ivan Chrucki. *Still life with game, vegetables and mushrooms*. 1854





Kazimir Aĺchimovič. *Old mill*. 1901

FRANCIŠAK BAHUŠEVIČ



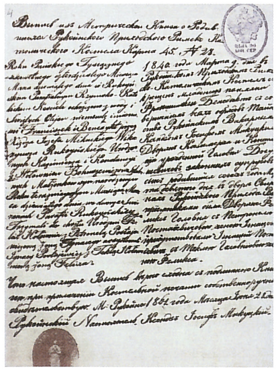
Francišak Bahuševič.
Photograph of the early 1890s

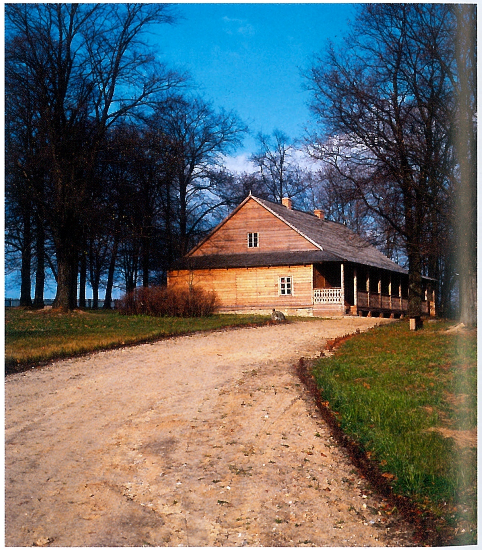
In 1891 the printing firm of Władysław Anczyc in Kraków put out a book by Francišak Bahuševič entitled *Dudka bielaruskaja* (Belarusian pipe). It was a collection of poems printed in the Latin script and published under a pseudonym, Maciej Buračok, instead of the author's real name. By that time the poet was already over 50 years of age.

Francišak Bieniadykt Bahuševič was born on 'the estate of Śvirany' (now in the Vilnia district of *Lietuva*). The gentry family into which he was born was far from wealthy and they were soon forced to move to their hereditary estate of Kušliany in the Ašmiana county. Here the future writer spent his childhood. He was sent off to study in the Vilnia Grammar School, where he was registered in the list of students 'who were unable to pay the required tuition fee'. Among Francišak's schoolfriends were Citus and Kanstancin Dalieŭski, Julian Čarnoŭski and Zyhmunt (Žyhimont) Miniejka, all of whom were later to play an active role in the 1863 uprising.

When the 1863 uprising began Bahuševič did not hesitate to take up arms. He fought in the unit commanded by Liudvik Narbut. He was wounded in a battle with the Russians in the forests of Aŭhustaŭ (Augustów). Once the uprising had been crushed, Francišak managed to avoid being chained up in a prison cell. The price of his freedom was 20 years of separation from his native land.

Page from the register recording the poet's birth





Bahuševič's estate house in Kušliany.
Photograph of early 1990s

CHRONOLOGY

21 March 1840 – 28 April 1900 – Francišak Bahuševič's life and work
1891 – Bahuševič's first book, *Dudka bielaruskaja* (Belarusian pipe), published in Kraków
1894 – his second book of verse, *Smyk bielaruski* (Belarusian bow), published in Poznań

Francišak Bahuševič.
Photograph.
1863



Francišak Bahuševič
with his family.
1864



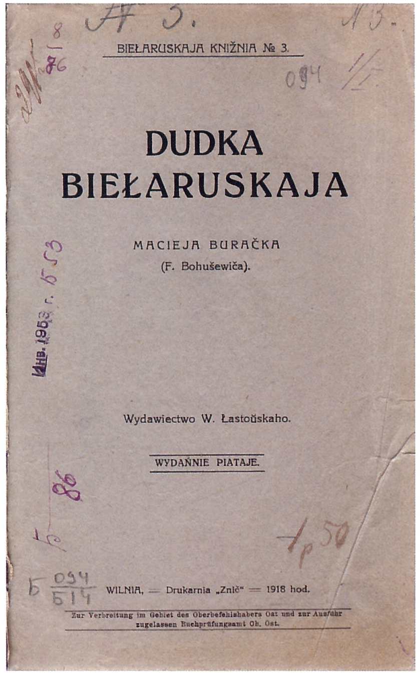
Bahuševič was one of the top four pupils of his year when he completed his studies at the grammar school; in 1861 he enrolled as a student in the physics and mathematics faculty of St Petersburg University. However, he was not destined to study in the imperial capital; the young lad from Kušliany, along with other students, was sent down for refusing to accept his student record book. This was in protest against new university regulations that restricted students' rights.

Francišak went back to Belarus, where he took the ideas of Vincent Dunin-Marcinkievič to heart – the nobility and the gentry have the responsibility to take education and learning to the masses in order to form a united front in the fight against Russian autocracy. And so Bahuševič went off to teach at a village school in the Lida county.

However, after joining the insurrection of 1863 he was forced to flee Belarus and spend 20 years outside his native land. During that time he trained as a lawyer in the Nizhyn Lyceum (the 'Bezborodko Lyceum', Ukraine) and worked as a court investigator in the governorates of Chernihiv, Sumy, Bransk and Vologda. It was not until 1884 that he was once again able to stroll through the narrow streets of Vilnia that he loved so much.

In Vilnia Bahuševič found employment as a barrister, dealing mainly with cases involving the poor of both town and country. He earned renown as the 'peasants' lawyer'.

One of the numerous editions of *Belarusian pipe*.
Vilnia. 1918. Belarusian in Latin script



BIEŁARUSKAJA KNIŽNIA № 3.

DUDKA
BIEŁARUSKAJA

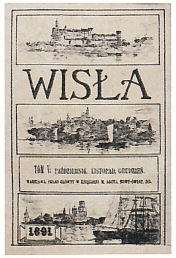
MACIEJA BURAČKA
(F. Bohušewiča).

Wydawiectwo W. Łastoŭskaho.

WYDAŇNIE PIATAJE.

WILNIA. — Drukarnia „Znič" — 1918 hod.

Zur Verbreitung im Gebiet des Oberbefehlshabers Ost und zur Ausfuhr zugelassen Buchprüfungsamt Ob. Ost.



Warsaw journal *Wisła* (Vistula), edited by Jan Karłowicz, a friend of Bahuševič, often carried articles about Belarus

Francišak Bahuševič posed the language problem succinctly in the preface to his *Belarusian pipe*: 'There have been many nations which first lost their language and then died out completely, just like a man who lost his power of speech just before dying. Do not abandon our Belarusian language, so that we may not die!..'

The first poems by Bahuševič that experts in Belarusian literature know about were written in Polish. He also wrote journalistic notes from Viĺnia in Polish that were published in the Petersburg magazine *Krai* (Territory). Even so, Bahuševič was aware of the bonds that tied him to the land of Belarus, its people and their language; it was to them that he decided to dedicate his talent. With a heart full of pain and sincerity 'Maciej Buračok' wrote in his *Belarusian pipe*:

'My dearest brothers, children of my Land, my mother: In dedicating this work to you, I must say a few things to you about our wretched lot in life, about the ancient tongue of our forefathers, which we – and others besides, all the folks with no education, call "peasant speak". It is really called "Belarusian". For us our language is sacred, it was given to us by God Himself... but we have allowed it to be mocked. Do we really have to read and write in a foreign tongue?

It's a good thing to know the language of our neighbours, in fact we have to know it, but above all we should know our own.

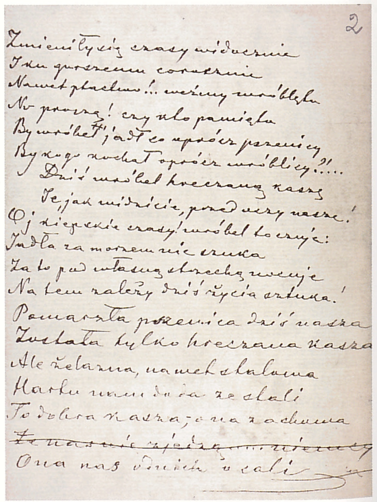
I thought a lot about this, my dear brothers, and then was emboldened to write these little verses for you. If anyone among you likes them, I shall be most grateful!..

Perhaps one of you will ask where exactly this Belarus is.

My dear brothers, Belarus is where its language lives – from Viĺnia to Mazyr, from Viciebsk almost as far as Chernihiv, it is there in Horadnia, Miensk, Mahilioŭ, Viĺnia and in many other little towns and villages...'

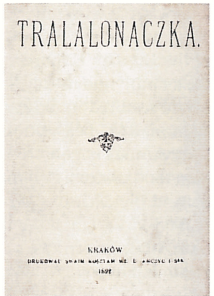


Personal effects on display in the poet's house in Kušliany, Smarhoń district, now a museum



Vierabiej i kaša (A sparrow and porridge) by Francišak Bahusevic in manuscript

One of the editions of Bahuševič's second book of verse *Smyk bielaruski* (Belarusian bow)



Bahuševič's *Tralialionačka*. Kraków. 1892





Memorial stone bearing the inscription *In memory of Maciej Buračok. 1900.* Near Kušliany. Photograph of the 1990s

Bahuševič's story *Tralialionačka* was published by the same Kraków firm a year later.

His second book of verse, *Smyk bielaruski* (Belarusian bow), appeared in 1894. It opens with these lines:

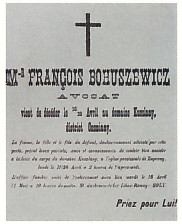
O, give me my bow,
That it may play everywhere!
Even if I disappear,
Let it go on sounding out
Over all the Earth,
Wherever people live
Where they have always lived!

He inherited some money from a relative in 1896. This enabled him to settle his debts, to enlarge the Kušliany estate house and at long last to leave his job and devote himself entirely to writing. He wrote more poetry and continued to work on compiling a dictionary of Belarusian. Researchers may one day find out what happened to his third book of verse, *Skrypka bielaruskaja* (Belarusian fiddle), that the censor banned. It is possible that they might discover the fate of his prose collection *Bielaruskija apaviadańni Buračka* (Buračok's Belarusian tales), submitted to the Viĺnia governorate printing house in 1899, a year before he died.

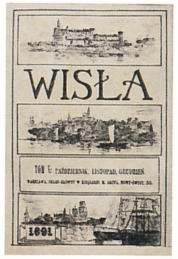
Real fame and recognition as a writer came to Bahuševič only after his death.



Memorial to Bahuševič in Župrany, Ašmiana district, where the poet is buried. By Zajir Azhur. 1958



Obituary in French. 1900



Warsaw journal *Wisła* (Vistula), edited by Jan Karłowicz, a friend of Bahuševič, often carried articles about Belarus

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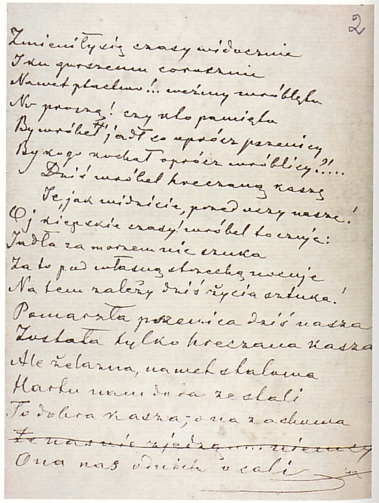
Perhaps one of you will ask where exactly this Belarus is.

My dear brothers, Belarus is where its language lives – from Vilnia to Mazyr, from Viciebsk almost as far as Chernihiv, it is there in Horadnia, Miensk, Mahilioŭ, Vilnia and in many other little towns and villages...'

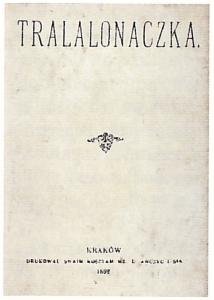


Personal effects on display in the poet's house in Kušliany, Smarhoń district, now a museum

Vierabiej i kaša (A sparrow and porridge) by Francišak Bahuševic in manuscript



One of the editions of Bahuševič's second book of verse *Smyk bielaruski* (Belarusian bow)



Bahuševič's *Tralialionačka*. Kraków. 1892





Memorial stone bearing the inscription *In memory of Maciej Buračok. 1900.* Near Kušliany. Photograph of the 1990s

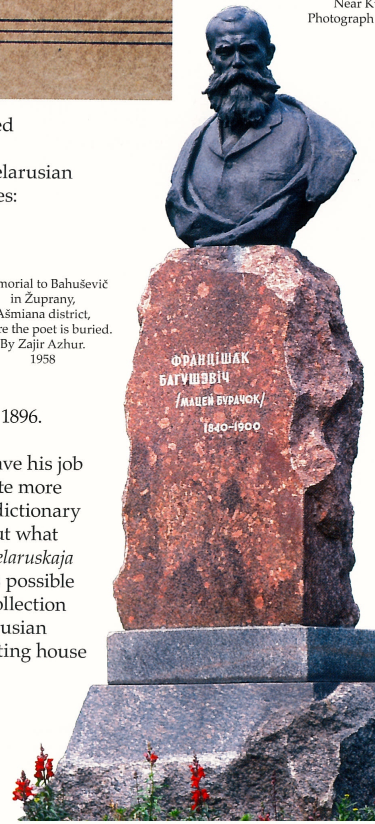
Bahuševič's story *Tralialionačka* was published by the same Kraków firm a year later.

His second book of verse, *Smyk bielaruski* (Belarusian bow), appeared in 1894. It opens with these lines:

O, give me my bow,
That it may play everywhere!
Even if I disappear,
Let it go on sounding out
Over all the Earth,
Wherever people live
Where they have always lived!

He inherited some money from a relative in 1896. This enabled him to settle his debts, to enlarge the Kušliany estate house and at long last to leave his job and devote himself entirely to writing. He wrote more poetry and continued to work on compiling a dictionary of Belarusian. Researchers may one day find out what happened to his third book of verse, *Skrypka bielaruskaja* (Belarusian fiddle), that the censor banned. It is possible that they might discover the fate of his prose collection *Bielaruskija apaviadańni Buračka* (Buračok's Belarusian tales), submitted to the Vilnia governorate printing house in 1899, a year before he died.

Real fame and recognition as a writer came to Bahuševič only after his death.



Memorial to Bahuševič in Župrany, Ašmiana district, where the poet is buried. By Zajir Azhur. 1958


M.r FRANÇOIS BOHUSZEWICZ

AVOCAT

Priez pour Lui!

Obituary in French. 1900

The Belarusian Socialist *Hramada* was founded and led by some outstanding representatives of the nationally-aware Belarusian intelligentsia: the brothers Ivan and Anton Luckievič, Alajiza Paškievič (pseudonym Ciotka), Kazimir Kastravicki (pseudonym Karuś Kahaniec), Vaclaŭ Ivanoŭski, and Alieś Burbis.



Vaclaŭ Ivanoŭski, one of the founders of the *Hramada*. 1914. Photograph from the collection of the former Ivan Luckievič Belarusian Museum in Vilnia

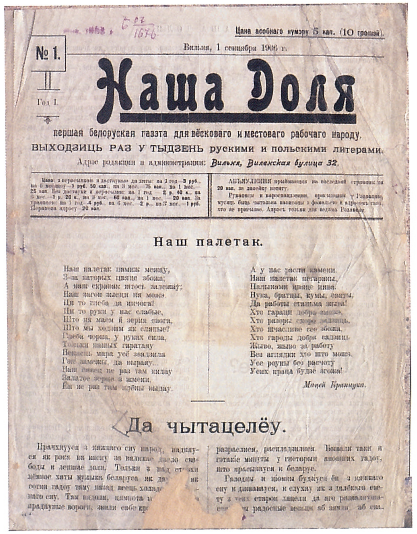
The *Hramada* (Assembly)

The Belarusian national liberation movement came to play an important role in the revolutionary events of the time. It aimed to bring about the national revival of the Belarusian people, their language and culture, and at the same time to win for them an 'honourable place among the nations of the world', in Janka Kupala's words. The organisation of the movement, the ideas behind it and the political impetus that drove it forward were all in the hands of the Belarusian Socialist *Hramada* (a Belarusian word best translated as 'assembly' or 'association'). This was in fact the very first Belarusian political party. The party's immediate objective was to join in the common struggle with all the nations of the empire to overthrow tsarist autocracy and assert democratic freedoms. The next step would be to build socialism. As far as the national question was concerned, the party's first programme presupposed the establishment of an independent Belarusian Democratic Republic.

March 1917. Revolutionary demonstration in Maladziečna



The mouthpiece of the Belarusian Socialist *Hramada* was the weekly *Naša Dolia* (Our Fate). Then another weekly, *Naša Niva* (Our Field) took its place. In 1906 the founders of the *Hramada* were actively involved in setting up, in St Petersburg, the first-ever legal Belarusian publishing house *Zahlanie sonca i ŭ naša vakonca* (The sun will look in at our little window, too).



Цана асобнаго нумэру 5 кап. (10 грошэй).

№ 1.

Год I.

Вильня, 1 сеницябра 1906 г.

Наша Доля

першая белоруская газэта для вёсковаго и местоваго рабочаго народу.

ВЫХОДЗИЦЬ РАЗ У ТЫДЗЕНЬ рускими и польскими литерами.

Адрэс радакции и администрации: *Вильня, Виленская булица 32.*

Наш палетак.

Да чытацелёў.

Naša Dolia (Our Fate), the first legal newspaper in Belarusian. It was published in two editions simultaneously, in the Latin and Cyrillic scripts, with a print run of 10,000 copies



Peace to the hovels, war on the palaces. By Marc Chagall. 1918

Hramada activists, the linguist Jazep Liosik and the writer Alieś Harun. Photograph of the early 20th century





Branislaŭ Taraškievič, politician and scholar, member of the Central Committee of the Belarusian Socialist *Hramada*. 1920s



Arkadź Smolič, scholar and politician, editor of the newspaper *Hramada*. Early 20th century

During the First World War Vaclaŭ Lastoŭski and the Luckievič brothers put forward a proposal to restore the Grand Duchy of Lithuania with the old city of Vilnia, then under German occupation, as its capital.

The events of 1917 helped the *Hramada* to grow in importance in Belarus itself, as well as to establish branches in St Petersburg, Moscow, Kyiv, Kazan' and other large cities. Very soon the *Hramada* became the most important political force within the Belarusian national movement. New leaders came to the fore. Among them were Alieś Prušynski (a writer who used the pseudonym Alieś Harun), Arkadź Smolič, Jazep Varonka, Jazep Dyla, Branislaŭ Taraškievič, Alieś Čarviakoŭ, Paluta Badunova, Źmicier Žylunovič (writing under the pseudonym Ciška Hartny) and Symon Rak-Michajloŭski.



Soldiers and workers' protest action in Luniniec. Photograph. 1917

Rally in Homieĺ. March 1917



Belarus was in dire need of agricultural reform. The reform programme proposed by the *Hramada* was opposed chiefly by representatives of the *Krajoŭcy* (*krajowcy*, 'fellow-countrymen'), such as Raman Skirmunt and Edvard Vajnilovič (Wojniłłowicz), who sought the restoration of the multinational Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Although not hostile to the idea of state independence, they wished to preserve private ownership of land but conceded that it could gradually be transferred to the peasants on condition of compensation. They considered that the total abolition of private land ownership would enslave the peasants even more by making them totally subservient to a new exploiting class – the state bureaucracy. These predictions came true in Soviet times, when Belarus suffered the tragedy of collectivisation.

The *Hramada* was one of the main organisers of the All-Belarusian Congress held in December 1917.

BELARUS AWAKENS



Maksim Bahdanovič's book of verse *Vianok* (Wreath). Vilnia. 1913

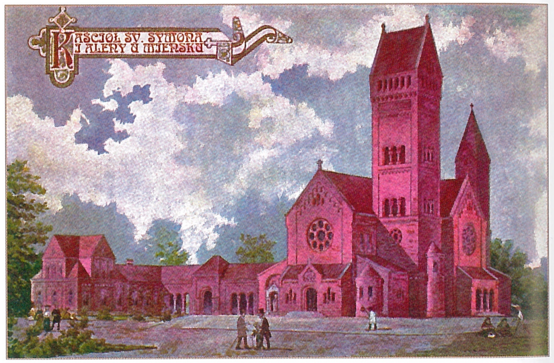
By the turn of the 20th century the Belarusian national movement was rapidly gaining momentum. Numerous publications on the culture, language and history of the Belarusian nation helped to arouse a sense of national identity in many people. Bahuševič's collections of poetry, *Belarusian pipe* and *Belarusian bow*, were still being circulated. The idea of creating a national political party began to take shape among patriotically-minded intellectuals. The aim of the party would be to lead the struggle for the national and social liberation of Belarus.

Among the first to realise the need for such a party were the Luckievič brothers, Ivan and Anton, sons of a veteran of the 1863 uprising. They are with justification called the fathers of the rebirth of the Belarusian nation. As early as 1902 they had been involved in a Group for Popular Education and Culture in Belarus while they were still students at St Petersburg University.

After the founding of the first Belarusian political party – the *Hramada* – Ivan Luckievič became its real leader. His brother Anton formulated the policies and wrote articles on burning social issues of the day. They played a vital part in the declaration of an independent Belarusian Democratic Republic several years later.



Politician and scholar Ivan Luckievič, one of the prime movers behind the national revival. Photograph. 1902



Roman Catholic Church of SS Simon and Helen (the Red Church) in Miensk. It was founded by Edvard Vajnilovič. He also supported the Belarusian national revival movement financially. Early 20th-century postcard

CHRONOLOGY

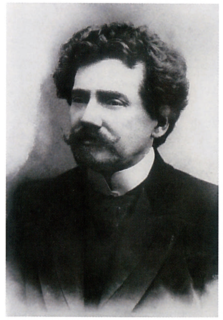
- 22 August 1861 – 22 September 1917 – life and work of Ihnat Bujnicki
- 9 June 1881 – 20 August 1919 – life and work of Ivan Luckievič
- 7 July 1882 – 28 June 1942 – life and work of Janka Kupala
- 3 November 1882 – 13 August 1956 – life and work of Jakub Kolas
- 8 November 1883 – 23 January 1938 – life and work of Vaclaŭ Lastoŭski
- 9 December 1891 – 25 May 1917 – life and work of Maksim Bahdanovič
- May 1906 – founding of the legal Belarusian publishing house *Zahlianie sonca i ŭ naša vakonca*
- 1910 – publication of Lastoŭski's *Brief history of Belarus*
- 1910–1913 – Ihnat Bujnicki's professional Belarusian theatre performs
- 1913 – Belarusian Publishing Association founded in Vilnia
- 1917 – First Association of Belarusian Drama and Comedy set up in Miensk



Belarusian family in festive national costume. Late 19th or early 20th centuries. Artist's impression by Michaś Ramaniuk



Vaclaŭ Lastoŭski, politician, historian, writer. He was called the 'irreplaceable secretary of the Belarusian revival'. 1916. Photograph from the collection of the former Ivan Luckievič Belarusian Museum in Vilnia



Mitrafan Doŭnar-Zapolski, founder of Belarusian national historiography. Photograph of the 1910s



Pobah coat of arms, used by the Doŭnar-Zapolski family

Learning and scholarship

Jaŭchim Karski's fundamental study in seven volumes *Belarusians* made an invaluable contribution to the process of national revival. Karski once and for all demonstrated that Belarusian was an independent member of the family of Slavonic languages. He compiled the map which delineated the area where the language was spoken.

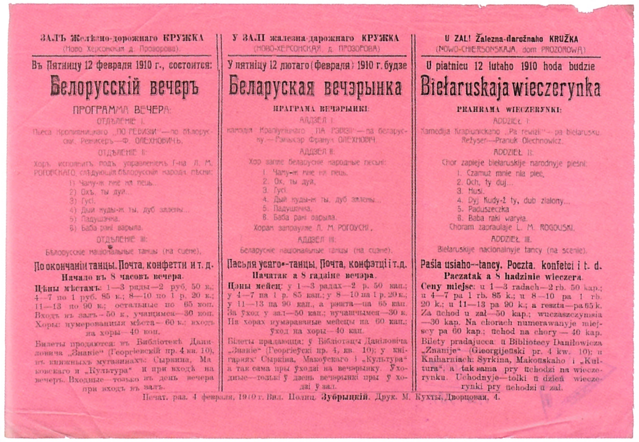
The achievements of the devoted collectors of Belarusian folklore – Aliaksandr Sieržputoŭski, Michal Fiedaroŭski, Jeŭdakim Ramanaŭ and Mikadzim Nikifaroŭski – were of tremendous significance for the nation's future prospects.

In the early 20th century Mitrafan Doŭnar-Zapolski, one of the founders of a national school of Belarusian historiography, published his major studies of the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

The politician, historian and writer Vaclaŭ Lastoŭski was convinced that there could be no national revival in Belarus without restoring to the people the truth about their nation's past. In 1910 he published his *Karotkaja historyja Bielarusi* (A brief history of Belarus) in Vilnia.

In the preface to his *Brief history of Belarus* Lastoŭski wrote, 'History is the foundation on which the life of a nation is built. If we are to build our life as a nation, if the building is to be strong, we need to start with the foundations, too. I dedicate this work of mine to the sons of our young Belarus – may they learn the history of their native land in their native language.'

Poster announcing one of the Belarusian *soirées* which were extremely popular at the time. St Petersburg. 1910



Ramuald Ziamkievič, book-lover and bibliographer. 1918



During the years of its existence the publishing house *Zahlianie sonca i ŭ naša vakonca* put out 38 titles with a total print run of more than 100,000 copies. About 250 books in all were published in Belarusian in the years 1901–1917.



Princess Mahdaliena Radzivil was brought up in the spirit of Belarusian culture, and supported it throughout her life. She financed the publishing house *Zahlianie sonca i ŭ naša vakonca*, the Belarusian Publishing Association and the newspaper *Bielarus* (The Belarusian). She helped publish the first books of Maksim Bahdanovič, Kanstancyja Bujla and other writers, and opened Belarusian schools on her domains. Photograph of the 1930s



Professor Branislaŭ Epimach-Šypila was at the centre of Belarusian intellectual life in the imperial capital. 1908

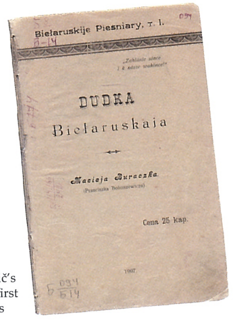
Publishing

The revolutionary events of 1905 had brought about the lifting of censorship and opened a window of opportunity for Belarusian-language book printing. In the following year the Belarusian publishing house called *Zahlianie sonca i ŭ naša vakonca* (The sun will look in at our little window, too) was founded in St Petersburg. The idea behind it is usually attributed to the scholar and teacher Branislaŭ Epimach-Šypila; he was at the centre of a group of Belarusian intellectuals who lived in the imperial capital. Vaclaŭ Ivanoŭski, one of the founders of the Belarusian national liberation movement, was in charge of *Zahlianie sonca i ŭ naša vakonca* and, at least initially, supported it financially.

It made a start by publishing Belarusian textbooks. The first book it put out was *Bielaruski liemantar* (Belarusian alphabet book) by Karuś Kahaniec. This was followed by Ciotka's *Pieršaje čytańnie dlia dzietak bielarusaŭ* (First reader for the children of Belarusians). The association also facilitated the publication of the first books by several Belarusian authors, including Janka Kupala's *Žaliejka* (Reed-pipe), Źmitrok Biadulia's *Abrazki* (Images), Ciška Hartny's *Pieśni* (Songs), and Kupala's later works, *Son na kurhanie* (Dream on a gravemound) and *Šliacham žyćcia* (On the road of life). Six volumes of the series *Bielaruskija pieśniary* (Belarusian bards) were published in 1907–1909, each with the print run of 4,300 copies; the first one was *Belarusian pipe* by Bahuševič.



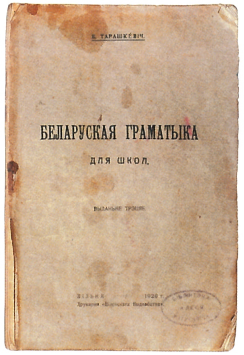
Works by the classics of Belarusian literature Janka Kupala and Jakub Kolas, published in the early 20th century



Zahlianie sonca i ŭ naša vakonca brought out Bahuševič's *Belarusian pipe* as the first volume in the series *Belarusian bards*. 1907

Periodical publications of the time from Belarus





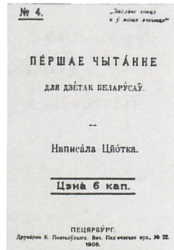
Bielaruskaja hramatyka dlia škol (Belarusian grammar for schools) by Branislaŭ Taraškievič. Vilnia. 1920



Belarusian editorial office after a police raid. Photograph of the time



Jazep Drazdovič was an outstanding artist, who represented the Belarusian school of historical painting. On the photograph he is wearing the uniform of a soldier of the 188th Kursk Infantry Regiment. Saratov. 1911



First reader for the children of Belarusians by Ciotka (Alajiza Paškievič), published by *Zahlianie sonca i ŭ naša vakonca*. St Petersburg. 1906

Nationally-aware Belarusian intellectuals started to organise music and drama events in Vilnia, Miensk, St Petersburg, Polacak, Slucak and other cities and towns throughout Belarus. These events came to be known as 'Belarusian *soirées*'. The publishing association issued ten dramas – both original and in translation – for these *soirées*. They included *The bear* by Chekhov and Eliza Orzeszkowa's *On a winter evening*.



8 НАША ДОЛЯ

АБЪЯУЛЕННЯ:

Беларуская Выдауницкая суполка „Загляне сонцэ и у наше ваконцэ"

радзиць усим купляць книги:

Biełaruski lementar, abo pieršaja nawuka čytannia . . . . cena 6 k.
Беларуски лементар, або першая навука чытания . . . . ц. 6 к.
Pieršaje čytannie dla dzietak biełarusoŭ cena 6 k.

Першае чытанне дла дзетак беларусоу цэна 6 к.
Вязанка Янки Лучыны (Ивана Неслухоуская) . . . . цэна 4 к.
Казки Выдау А. К. . . . . . . цэна 6 к.

Беларуские почтовые писульки:

Ščorsuny u letko, Ščorsuny u zimku; Prancišek Bohušewič (Maciej Buračok) Pieśniar Biełaruski; Wincuk Marcinkiewič—pieśniar Biełaruski; Mužyki spad Puchawič; Toržyšče u Puchowičach; Dziсučaty spad Słucka; Parabkawa dwornaja chata; Dudar Biełaruski; Janka Łučyna (Iwan Niesłouchouski), pieśniar Biełaruski; Wiaskowaja baba s Trybuškou; Dom Tadeuša Kościuški u Merečouščyni, cena kožnoje pisulki 5 kap.

Усё гэта можна купляць у глауным складзе *у Пецярбургу, Василёу востроу, 4 линя № 45, кв. 16* и усюды у великших книгарнях.

Хто купляе у глауным складзе ня менш як за поу рубля, той ня плациць за прасланне почтаю.

Малые грошы можна высылаць почтовыми марками.

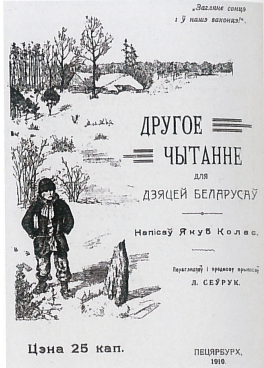
Advertisement for *Zahlianie sonca i ŭ naša vakonca* in the newspaper *Naša Dolia*

Jakub Kolas' first collection of poetry *Pieśni žalby* (Songs of sorrow). Vilnia. 1910



Jakub Kolas was one of the founders of modern Belarusian literature. His work was instrumental in shaping the modern Belarusian literary language. Photograph of the 1910s





Druhoje čytańnie dlia dziaciej bielarusaŭ (Second reader for the children of Belarusians) by Jakub Kolas. Cover design by Karuś Kahaniec. St Petersburg. 1910

'he finest and deepest
:xpression of the spirit
of the Belarusian
evival at the beginning
of the 20th century
s to be found
n literature.



Maksim
3ahdanovič.
Photograph.
1915

Literature

This was the period that revealed the creative genius of Maksim Bahdanovič, Janka Kupala and Jakub Kolas. It witnessed the flowering of such talents as Maksim Harecki, Ciotka (Alajiza Paškievič), Źmitrok Biadulia, Alieś Harun, Karuś Kahaniec *et al*. Thanks to them Belarusian prose and poetry rapidly rose to the heights of the most developed Slavonic literatures and became thereby an integral element in the common European literary process.



Poet's personal effects. From the Bahdanovič Literary Museum in Miensk



Bahdanovič's collection of poetry *Wreath* was reprinted numerous times

Janka Kupala in the Vilnia period of his life and work. Photograph of 1908



Huge strides were taken towards the creation of a truly national theatre. Comedies *Modny šliachciuk* (A fashionable squire) by Karuś Kahaniec, *Paŭlinka* and *Prymaki* (Wife-swapping) by Kupala were very popular. Kupala's drama *Raskidanaje hniazdo* (A scattered nest) was completed in 1913. It was at this time that Francišak Aliachnovič began his career working in theatres and writing plays.

Belarusian journalism and literary criticism matured in the struggle with the chauvinistic writings of both Russians and Poles; in this the achievements of Maksim Bahdanovič, Siarhiej Palujan and Liavon Hmyrak were of crucial importance.

Taras on Parnassus, published by the *Volnaja Bielaruś* (Free Belarus) group. Miensk. 1917





First edition of Alieś Harun's collection of poetry *Matčyn dar* (Mother's gift). Miensk. 1918



Birthplace of Janka Kupala. Viazynka, Maladziečna district. Photograph of the 1980s



Bielaruski kaliandar (Belarusian calendar) for 1914. Cover design by Jazep Drazdovič. Vilnia



Ihnat Bujnicki (centre) with his actors. Photograph. 1910



Playbill for Bujnicki's First Belarusian Theatre. August 1911

Theatre

n the years 1910–1913
hnat Bujnicki's theatre
ompany toured
lmost all of Belarus.
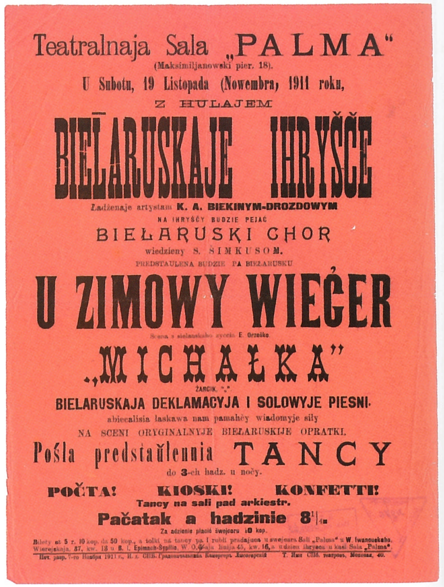
The talented actor and director Ihnat Bujnicki originally founded the First Belarusian Theatre Company on the Palievačy estate in the Dzisna county. In 1910 it was transformed into a national professional theatre, comprising a drama troupe, a choir and a dance group.

Founders of the First Belarusian Drama and Comedy Association (standing): Usievalad Falski (left) and Flaryjan Ždanovič (right) with Prime Minister of Belarus Jazep Varonka. April 1918



Marc Chagall. *The Blue House*. 1920





Poster for a Belarusian *soirée*. Petersburg. 1911



Activists of the Belarusian national revival (left to right): the journalist and literary critic Uladzimir Samojla, the playwright and theatre director Francišak Aliachnovič, the journalist and man of ideas behind the national revival Anton Luckievič. Photograph of the 1930s

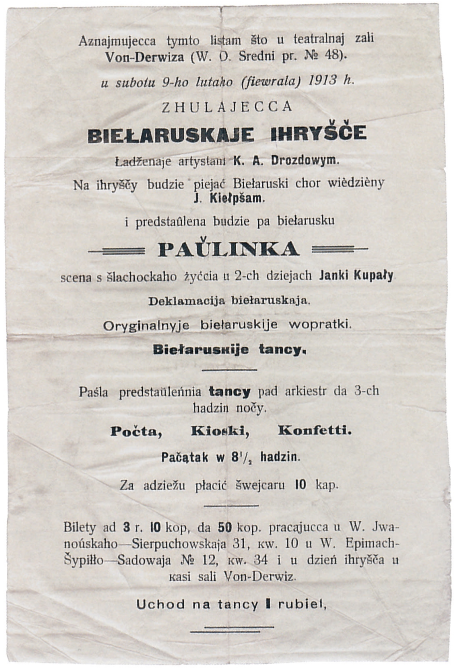
The Vilnia-based amateur Belarusian Music and Drama Group was run by Alieś Burbis. On 27 January 1912 it put on the first-ever performance of Kupala's *Paŭlinka*. The playwright and stage director Francišak Aliachnovič was another energetic participant in the national revival movement.



Playbill for a performance of Aliachnovič's play *Na Antokali* (In the Antokaĺ district). Vilnia. 1917



Playbill in German advertising a performance of a play based on *The boor* by Eliza Orzeszkova, produced by Aliachnovič. Vilnia. 1916



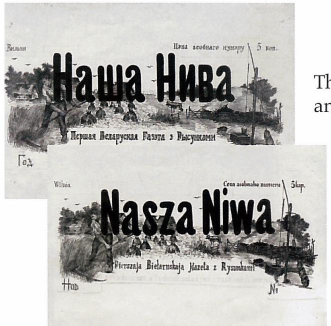
Betrothed couple in national costume. Late 19th – early 20th centuries. Artistic impression by Michaś Ramaniuk

The First Belarusian Drama and Comedy Association was founded in Miensk in 1917. It staged the first performance of Kupala's play *A scattered nest*.



Announcement and invitation to a Belarusian *soirée* with dancing, organised by Vaclaŭ Ivanoŭski and Branislaŭ Epimach-Šypila. 1913

THE NEWSPAPER NAŠA NIVA



Designs proposed by Jazep Drazdovič for *Naša Niva* masthead n Belarusian Latin script and Cyrillic

The first issue of the *Naša Dolia* weekly appeared in September 1906. This was the first such legal publication in Belarusian 'for the peasantry and workers of the small towns of Belarus'.

It came out simultaneously in two versions, one in the Latin script and the other in Cyrillic, on eight pages, in a print run totalling 10,000 copies.

The newspaper was created by a group of members of the Belarusian Socialist *Hramada*. The first issue contained Jakub Kolas' poem *Naš rodny kraj* (Our native land) and Ciotka's revolutionary story *Prysiaha nad kryvavymi razorami* (Swearing an oath over the blood-stained furrows). However, the political line of the *Naša Dolia* was determined not so much by the literary works it published, but by its articles on social and political topics. They informed the readership about events in the Russian Empire and revealed the true nature of tsarism and the 'truly Russian people' in Belarus. It came as no surprise, therefore, that on the very next day after it appeared, the first issue was confiscated and the police raided the editorial office.



Vilnia intelligentsia in front of the *Naša Niva* editorial offices. First left is Ivan Luckievič

Naša Niva played a vital role in arousing Belarusians to seek an independent life for themselves. It was at the very heart of the national revival movement.


Цана асобнага нумару 5 кап.

Год IV Вільня 12 (25) марца 1909 г. № 11.

Наша Ніва

Першая Беларуская Газэта з Рысункамі

Выходзіць што тыдзень рускімі і польскімі літэрамі.

Тарас Шэўчэнко

Украінскі песняр ТАРАС ШЭВЧЭНКО.

Naša Niva gave its readers an opportunity to discover other European literatures, in the first instance Polish, Russian and Ukrainian. Front page of the issue of 25 March 1909

CHRONOLOGY

4 September 1906 – first issue of the legal Belarusian newspaper *Naša Dolia* appears

3 November 1906 – Belarusian weekly *Naša Niva* commences publication



In 1914–1915 the editor and publisher of *Naša Niva* was Janka Kupala. Photograph. 1914

The paper never really had an opportunity to expand its activities properly. It was continually stifled by the censor's noose. Four out of six issues were confiscated. On several occasions the Vilnia court examined the case for sequestering issues of the paper, and finally, in January 1907, delivered its verdict: the paper was to be banned and the editor imprisoned for a year.

Naša Dolia ceased to exist, but a new Belarusian weekly paper had already arisen to take its place. In the gap between the fourth and fifth numbers of *Naša Dolia*, in November 1906, the first issue of *Naša Niva* (Our Field) found its way to Belarusian readers. This paper was destined to survive longer and be more fortunate than *Naša Dolia*. The pages of the new paper carried articles on society and politics, literature, art and popular science. It came to play a crucial role in uniting all the various groups that were fighting for the revival of Belarus.



Navina coat of arms used by the Luckievič family



Poet Kanstancyja Bujla. Photograph of the 1930s

In its first issue *Naša Niva* promised to serve 'the whole of the wronged Belarusian nation'. The paper changed its political stance depending on the situation; its pages reflected both revolutionary and liberal tendencies. However, *Naša Niva* never failed to oppose Russian 'great power' imperialism and Polish chauvinism; it spoke out consistently in support of democratic rights and freedoms against reaction and the terror of the 'Black Hundred' gangs.

Founders of *Naša Niva*: Ivan Luckievič (left) and Aliaksandr Ulasaŭ. Vilnia. 1910



Naša Niva was founded by Ivan and Anton Luckievič and their close ally in the Belarusian Socialist *Hramada* Aliaksandr Ulasaŭ. The newspaper was published in Vilnia until August 1915 and after a long suspension period, caused by the First World War, it also came out from October to December 1920. *Naša Niva* for six years appeared in two editions, one in Latin script and the other in Cyrillic; the Latin script edition was dropped in October 1912. Its editors were Zyhmunt Volski, Aliaksandr Ulasaŭ, Janka Kupala and Uladzislaŭ Znamiaroŭski.



Aliaksandr Ulasaŭ, editor and publisher of *Naša Niva*. The photograph was given to Anton Luckievič on 31 December 1922. From the collection of the former Ivan Luckievič Belarusian Museum in Vilnia

Naša Niva succeeded in becoming a genuinely popular newspaper for the whole of Belarus. Suffice it to say that in the first three years of its existence it published more than 900 contributions from correspondents in 490 small towns and villages.

The contribution made by the paper to the development of Belarusian literature is truly immeasurable. It was on its pages that many writers made their literary debut: Maksim Bahdanovič with his story *Muzyka* (The musician), Maksim Harecki, Alieś Harun, Kanstancyja Bujla, Žmitrok Biadulia, Ciška Hartny, Janka Žurba, Uladislaŭ Halubok. Kupala's long poems *Kurhan* (Gravemound) and *Bandaroŭna*, extracts from Jakub Kolas' *Novaja ziamlia* (The new land), literary criticism by Maksim Bahdanovič and Maksim Harecki, Siarhiej Paluian and Uladzimir Samojla – all appeared in the paper. Readers could find the best works from other literatures, predominantly Russian, Polish and Ukrainian. Subscribers could read in their own language the works of Lev Tolstoi, Adam Mickievič, Taras Shevchenko, Eliza Orzeszkowa, Stefan Žeromski *et al.*



Žmitrok Biadulia. Photograph of the 1910s. From the collection of the former Ivan Luckievič Belarusian Museum in Vilnia



Carafe, manufactured in Miensk. Early 20th century



Postcards sent to the *Naša Niva* editorial offices by the writers Ciška Hartny and Žmitrok Biadulia

Poet Janka Žurba began his literary career on the pages of *Naša Niva*. Photograph. 1914





Aliaksandr Ulasaŭ with a group of Vilnia Belarusians. Photograph from the collection of the former Ivan Luckievič Belarusian Museum in Vilnia



Цэна асобнаго нумэру 5 кап

Год IV Вільня 3 (16) дзекабра 1909 г. № 49.

Наша Ніва

Перщая Беларуская Газэта з Рысункамі

Выходзіць што тыдзень рускімі і польскімі літэрамі.

Адрэс рэдакціі і адміністрацыі: Вільня, Віленская вуліца, д. № 20.

Цэна з перасылкай і дастаукай да хаты: на 1 г.—2 р. 50 к., на 6 мес. —1 р. 25 к., на 3 м.—65 к., на 1 мес. —25 к. За границай: на 1 г. — 4 р., на 6 мес. —2 р., на 3 мес. —1 р. Перемена адрэсу — 20 кап.

Гэтымі днямі выйдзе з друку

Беларускі Календар

„НАШАЕ НІВЫ".

на 1910 г.

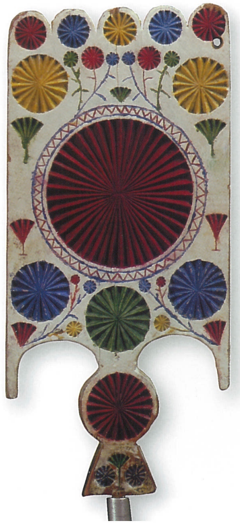
КАЛЕНДАР выйдзе у двох выданьнях—лацінскімі і рускімі літэрамі (6,000 экз.) Пры календары будуць аддзелы: статыстычны, аб сельскай гаспадарцы, юрыдычны, літэратурны і т. д. У прыдатку—песьня беларуская Янука Купалы „А хто там ідзе" з нотамі (музыка Л. М. Рогоускаго).

Цэна календара—15 кап., с перасылкай—20 кап.

Календар будзе прадавацца: у канторы „Нашае Нівы" у Вільні, 2) у беларускай выдавецкай суполцэ „Загляне сонцэ і у нашэ ваконцэ" у Пецербурге, 3) на усіх вялікшых кнігарнях нашаго краю і 4) На усіх агентурах „Нашае Нівы" у мястэчках і вёсках, где прадаецца газэта. Заказы на календар ужо прыймаюцца у канторы „Нашае Нівы". Малые грошы да аднаго рубля можно прысылаць пачтовымі маркамі у 2, 5, 7 і 10 капеек.

Naša Niva with an advertisement for the *Belarusian Calendar* for 1910

The editors also engaged in publishing activity. As a result a number of Belarusian calendars and almanacs appeared. Translated works and books by Jakub Kolas, Jadvihin Š. and Hallias Lieŭčyk were published under the *Naša Niva* imprint. The process of fine-tuning the Belarusian literary language and its orthography was conducted both on the pages of the newspaper and in some of its other publications. *Naša Niva* contributed greatly to the development and popularisation of the Belarusian theatre, music, folklore and the whole of the national culture in general.



Editorial staff of *Naša Niva* were very much involved with the local and regional history of Belarus and the collection of historical artefacts, as well as with publishing. Distaff from near Kamieniec. 19th century. From Michaś Ramaniuk's collection



744 НАША НІВА. № 50

Выйшоу з друку і прадаецца

ПЕРШЫ БЕЛАРУСКІ

Календар

„НАШАЕ НІВЫ"

на 1910 год.

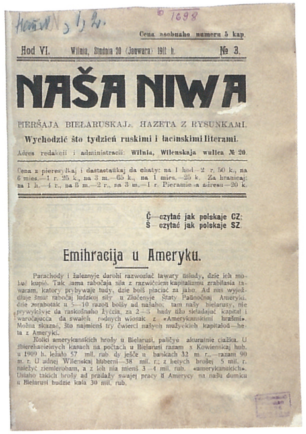
Цэна 15 кап. с перасылкай—20 кап.

Друкарня М. Кухты, Дворцовая, д. № 4.

Celebratory 50th issue of *Naša Niva*. 1910

Naša Niva had subscribers in all corners of Belarus. Copies were also sent to several towns in the Russian Empire, to Prague, Brno, Paris, Liège and the United States.

Until 1912
Naša Niva came out
in both Latin script
and Cyrillic.
Issue of 20 January
1911


Cena asobnaho numeru 5 kap.

Hod VI. Wilnia, Studnia 20 (Jauwara) 1911 h. № 3.

NAŠA NIWA

PIERŠAJA BIEŁARUSKAJA HAZETA Z RYSUNKAMI.

Wychodzić što tydzień ruskimi i łacinskimi literami.

Adres redakcii i administracii: Wilnia, Wilenskaja wulica № 20.

Cena z pieresyłkaj i dastaŭkaj da chaty: na 1 hod—2 r. 50 k., na 6 mies.—1 r. 25 k., na 3 m.—65 k., na 1 mies.—25 k. Za hranicaj: na 1 h.—4 r., na 6 m.—2 r., na 3 m.—1 r. Pieramiena adresu—20 k.

Č—czytać jak polskaje CZ.
Š—czytać jak polskaje SZ.

Emihracija u Ameryku.

Parachody i żaleznyje darohi razwoziać tawary ŭsiudy, dzie ich mohuć kupić. Tak sama rabočaja siła z razwićciem kapitalizmu zrabilasia tawaram, katory prybywaje tudy, dzie bolš płaciać za jaho. Ad nas wyježdžaje šmat rabočaj ludzkoj siły u Złučenyje Štaty Paŭnočnaj Ameryki, dzie zarabotak u 5—10 razoŭ bolšy ad našaho; tam našy bielarusy, nie prywykšyje da raskošnaho žyćcia, za 2—3 hady ŭžo składajuć kapitał i waročajucca da swaich rodnych wiosak z «Amerykanskimi hrašmi». Možna skazać, što najmienš try čwierci našych mužyckich kapitałoŭ—heta z Ameryki.

Kolki amerykanskich hrošy u Bielarusi, paličyć akuratnie ciažka.

Everyone working on the weekly – publishers and staff alike – regarded it as their duty to awaken the nation's historical memory. In 1910 the paper published Vaclaŭ Lastoŭski's *Brief history of Belarus* in instalments over several issues.

Naša Niva also performed a great service in focusing on regional and local history and the need to find and preserve traditional artefacts and antiques. Ivan Luckievič had brought together a unique collection of such items which he kept in the editorial offices. This is how Źmitrok Biadulia describes it, 'On the walls hang pictures of old Belarusian princes, clothing and other items from the olden days like sabres, helmets, and 16th-century armour. You can see traditional hand-woven cloth, Slucak belts, carpets, and carved wood. In the cupboards lie treasures from bygone days: coins, medals, seals, old books. A living poem of antiquity!'



Poet Ciotka with a girl in national dress. Early 20th century. Photograph from the collection of the former Ivan Luckievič Belarusian Museum in Vil'nia


NAŠA NIWA.

...o nia zdoleje adzin płacić za «Našu Niwu», chaj znojdzie ješče kolki ludziej i wypiše hazetu chaŭrusam.
...to spahadaje sprawie adradžennia našaho narodu, niechaj padtrymaje našu pracu i padpišecca na «Našu Niwu».

AD REDAKCII.

Wyjšła z druku i pradajecca ŭ Kantory „Našaje Niwy"
KAROTKAJA HISTORYJA BIEŁARUSI
z 40 rysunkami. napisaŭ WŁAST
Cena 60 kap.

„ВСЯ ВИЛЬНА"

Въ книжныхъ магазинахъ поступила въ продажу адресная и справочная книга „ВСЯ ВИЛЬНА" на 1911 годъ 10 отдѣловъ, 500 страницъ. Списокъ жителей, планы г. Вильны и Виленской губ.

Цѣна книги 1 руб. 25 к. въ папкѣ 1 руб. 40 коп. и въ коленкоровомъ переплетѣ 1 руб. 65 коп.

Адресъ редакціи. Больная № 64.

Page from one of the issues of *Naša Niva* for 1911


Bernardine Bridge in Vil'nia. Photograph by Jazep Čachovič. 1880s


Zoška Vieras, writer and activist of the national movement. Photograph. 1916

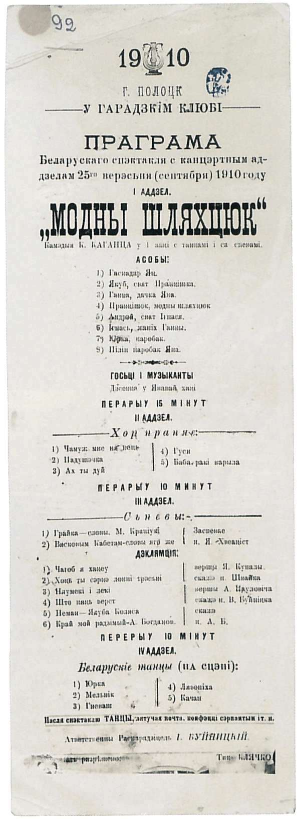
The Vil'nia Committee on Printed Matter – in effect the censorship agency – characterised *Naša Niva* in the following way, 'It was at first a little more moderate than *Naša Dolia*, but then it began to publish articles of a seditious nature, for which reason the print runs were confiscated on several occasions.'

Michal Lotyš, one of the first correspondents of *Naša Niva*. Early 20th century photograph



Ciška Hartny, writer and public figure. Miensk. 1926




1910

Г. ПОЛОЦК

У ГАРАДЗКІМ КЛЮБІ

ПРАГРАМА

Беларускаго спэктакля с канцэртным аддзелам 25го верэсьня (сентября) 1910 году

I АДДЗЕЛ.

„МОДНЫ ШЛЯХЦЮК"

Камэдыя К. КАГАНЦА у 1 акці с танцамі і са спевамі.

АСОБЫ:

1) Гаспадар Ян.
2) Якуб, сват Пранцішка.
3) Ганна, дачка Яна.
4) Пранцішок, модны шляхцюк
5) Андрэй, сват Ігнася.
6) Ігнась, жаніх Ганны.
7) Юрка, паробак.
8) Пілін паробак Яна.

ГОСЬЦІ І МУЗЫКАНТЫ

Дзеецца у Янавай хаці

ПЕРАРЫУ 15 МІНУТ

II АДДЗЕЛ.

Хор прання:

1) Чамуж мне ня пеці
2) Падушэчка
3) Ах ты дуй
4) Гуси
5) Баба раки варыла

ПЕРАРЫУ 10 МИНУТ

III АДДЗЕЛ.

Сьпевы:

1) Грайка—словы. М. Крапіўкі
2) Васковым Кабетам-словы ягожь
Заспевае п. Я. Хвеацієт

ДЭКЛЯМЦІЯ:

1) Чагоб я хацеу
2) Хоць ты сэрцэ лопні трэсьні
— вершы Я. Купалы скажэ п. Швайка
3) Наумекі і лекі
4) Што наць верст
— вершы А. Паўловіча скажэ п. В. Буйніцка
5) Неман—Якуба Коляса
6) Край мой радзімый-А. Богдановіч
— скажэ п. А. Б.

ПЕРЕРЫУ 10 МІНУТ

IV АДДЗЕЛ.

Беларускіе танцы (на сцэні):

1) Юрка
2) Мельнік
3) Гневаш
4) Лявоніха
5) Качан

Пасля спэктаклю ТАНЦЫ, лятучая почта, конфэцці сэрпантын і т. п.

Атветственны Распарадзіцель І. БУЙНИЦКІЙ

Тип. КЛЯЧКО

Programme of a show based on Karuś Kahaniec's play *A fashionable squire*, performed by Ihnat Bujnicki's Belarusian Theatre Company


Stary Ulas (pseudonym of Uladzislaŭ Sivy-Sivicki), a poet who wrote for *Naša Niva*. Photograph of the 1920s

The newspaper *Naša Niva* formed a whole epoch of its own in the period of the Belarusian national revival at the beginning of the 20th century.

Painted Belarusian chest. Beginning of the 20th century. Photograph by Michaś Ramaniuk



THE FIRST WORLD WAR



Tsar's medal awarded for services during mobilisation in the First World War. Obverse and reverse. 1914

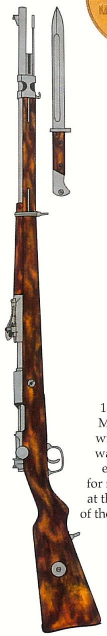
This was a war for the re-division of an already divided world between the German-Austrian bloc of states and the Entente (Great Britain, France and Russia). The immediate cause of the breakout of war was the murder of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne Archduke Franz Ferdinand by Serbian terrorists. Germany declared war on the Russian Empire on 1 August, and was followed five days later by Austria-Hungary.

In the campaign of 1915 Germany directed the main thrust of its armies against Russia. The Russian High Command accordingly established a Western Front in August of that year, with its headquarters in Miensk. Belarus had become a frontline zone. Industrial production and the amount of land available for crops and animal husbandry were cut back sharply. Around half the male population was mobilised, and hundreds of thousands of people became refugees, many of them forcibly.

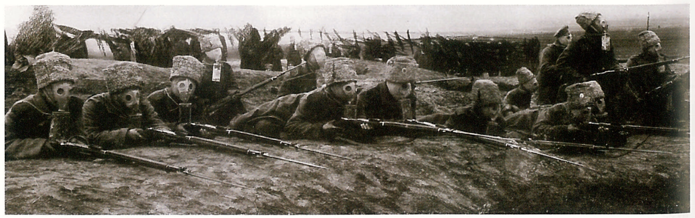
Following the German advance in the summer of 1915 the Russian forces abandoned Warsaw, then Koŭna (Kaunas), Bieraście and Horadnia. By September a German cavalry group consisting of six divisions had broken through the front line in the direction of Śvianciany–Barysaŭ, seized Viliejka and drew close to Maladziečna. Some units reached Barysaŭ and Smaliavičy. Vilnia was occupied.



Russian observation crews with balloon. Naroŭlia



1898 model Mauser rifle with bayonet was standard equipment for many armies at the beginning of the 20th century



Chemical weapons were widely used for the first time in the First World War. Before a gas attack

CHRONOLOGY

1 August 1914 – First World War begins
March 1916 – Russian Army launches an attack near Lake Narač
3 March 1918 – peace treaty is signed between Soviet Russia and the Central Powers in Bieraście

About half of the territory of Belarus, with more than 3,000,000 inhabitants, came under German occupation. Conditions in the rest of the country were also extremely difficult. Almost 2,000,000 Russian soldiers and officers were quartered there, together with the Supreme High Command. More than 1,000,000 refugees from Poland and the western counties of Belarus had gathered in the area close to the front line.



Refugee camp in Vorša. Photograph. 1918



In the trenches of the First World War. 1914



Front-line soldiers with Bolshevik propaganda material



Belarusian village destroyed during military action. 1916

Military hospital in Miensk. Postcard of the early 20th century



After fierce fighting around Maladziečna, Viliejka and Smarhoń, which lasted some ten days, the Second Russian Army succeeded in breaking through the enemy lines. The Germans withdrew to Lakes Narač and Śvir; both sides dug in and a period of trench warfare began. For some time the front ran along a line from Dźvinsk (now Daugavpils in Latvia), past Lake Narač, through Baranavičy to Pinsk.

The German occupying forces regarded the Belarusians as a nation in their own right and took a civilised view of their language and culture.



Refugees queuing for the field kitchen. Vorša. 1918



The front line. People had been living here not long before. Photograph. 1916



Russian Army private's belt buckle



Graduate of the Polacak Cadet Corps Jazep Stabroŭski with his wife. At the end of the war he held the rank of colonel. After returning home he founded the Slonim Regional Museum, which contained one of the richest collections in western Belarus. Photograph of the 1910s

Belarusian national organisations continued to function in the occupied regions. With the active participation of Ivan Luckievič 200 elementary schools with instruction in Belarusian were opened. A training college was opened and courses organised for Belarusian teachers. These were the first places of learning to use Belarusian as the language of instruction in the country's modern history.

To fulfil the terms of an agreement with the allied powers the Russian High Command agreed to attack on a broad front in the summer of 1916. However, the French found themselves in serious difficulties at Verdun; in order to help them out the attack got under way earlier than planned, in March, and only on a narrow sector of the front near Lake Narač. The attack began with insufficient artillery support and in adverse weather conditions. It was a poorly prepared operation which – in spite of the heroism of the Russian troops – yielded only minor tactical successes. Russian losses amounted to around 100,000 men killed, wounded or captured.



Belarusians at war. Ściapan Sieŭruk and Kuźma Revut from the Slucak county, Miensk governorate



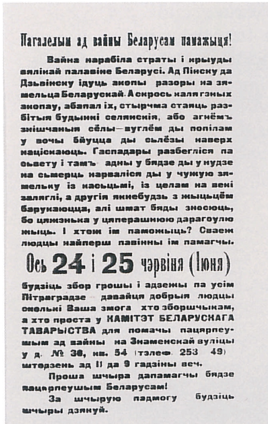
On the front line. Evacuating the inhabitants of a small Belarusian town. 1915

Front-line field hospital. 1916



Crushing defeats and inadequate supplies of food and ammunition led to unrest in the armies in the front line. The most serious unrest occurred in Homieĺ in October 1916. 4,000 soldiers and cossacks rose up in revolt, disarmed the guards, freed 800 men under arrest in the guardhouse and destroyed incriminating documents. After the Bolshevik coup of October 1917 the front-line soldiers were largely instrumental in putting the communists in power in the parts of Belarus that were not occupied by the Germans.

Leaflet and seal of the Belarusian Association for Aid to the Victims of War. 1916



Пагалелым ад вайны Беларусам памажыця!

Вайна нарабіла страты і крыуды вялікай палавіне Беларусі. Ад Пінску да Дзьвінску ідуць акопы разоры на зямельца Беларускай. А скрось каля гэных акопау, абапал іх, стырчма стаяць разбітыя будынкі селянскія, або агнём знішчаныя сёлы—вуглём ды попілам у вочы біуцца ды сьлёзы наверх націскаюць. Гаспадары разбегліся па сьвету і тамъ адны у бядзе ды у нудзе на сьмерць нарваліся ды у чужую зямельку із касьцьмі, із целам на векі залеглі, а другія якнебудзь з жыцьцём баруцкаюцца, алі шмат бяды зносюць, бо цяжэнька у цяперашнюю дарагоулю жыць. І хтож ім памажыць? Сваеж людцы найперш павінны ім памагчы.

Ось 24 і 25 чэрвіня (Іюня)

будзіць збор грошы і адзежы па усім Пітраградзе давайця добрыя людцы сколькі Ваша змога хто зборшчыкам, а хто проста у КАМІТЭТ БЕЛАРУСКАГА ТАВАРЫСТВА для помачы пацярпеушым ад вайны на Знаменскай вуліцы у д. № 38, кв. 54 (тэлеф. 253 49) штодзень ад 11 да 9 гадзіны веч.

Проша шчыра дапамагчы бядзе пацярпеушым Беларусам!

За шчырую падмогу будзіць шчыры дзякуй.





At the front. Soldiers threshing in a deserted Belarusian village

A peace treaty was signed between Soviet Russia and the Central Powers in Bieraście (Brest-Litovsk) in March 1918. The treaty left part of Belarus in German hands.



Refugees at the demarcation line. Vorša. 1917

Checking refugees. Photograph. 1918



The First World War, which ended with the total defeat of the Germans and their allies, inflicted huge losses on the Belarusian people. 1,200,000 people had been killed, hundreds of thousands of Belarusians were unable to return from the places to which they had been evacuated and remained somewhere in the vast expanses of the Russian Empire. Thousands more had been taken off to forced labour in Germany. In the period of 1914–1917 the amount of arable land was reduced by three quarters. Most of the industrial base had been destroyed. 150,000 buildings, among them many of the most valuable monuments of Belarusian history and culture, had been turned to ashes and rubble.



Communal grave of soldiers killed in battle between 1914 and 1916 near the village of Luža, Miadziel district. Photograph. 1957

THE FIRST ALL-BELARUSIAN CONGRESS


Niezwyczajny dadatak. Cena 5 fen. (3 kap.)

HOMAN

BIEŁARUSKAJA WILENSKAJA CZASOPIS

WYCHODZIĆ DWA RAZY U TYDZIEŃ: U AUTORKI I PIATNICY.

Wilnia, 5 listapada 1916 h.

Z WARSZAWY telehrafujuć:

Da žycharoŭ Warszaŭskaho Hieneral-Hubernatarstwa.

juć poŭnuju nadzieju, szto žadańnia dzieržaŭnaho i nacyonalnaho razwićcia Karaleŭstwa Polszczy ciapier buduć spoŭnieny z naležnaj uwahaj na ahulnyje palitycznyje warunki Eu-

Homan, a newspaper that supported a democratic Belarusian state

The revolutions of February and October 1917 in Russia drew the various Belarusian national organisations closer together into the Supreme Belarusian Council. The Council called an All-Belarusian Congress in Miensk to determine the country's future.

Ivan Sierada was elected Chairman of the Congress.


Ivan Sierada, chairman of the First All-Belarusian Congress. Prison photograph of the 1930s

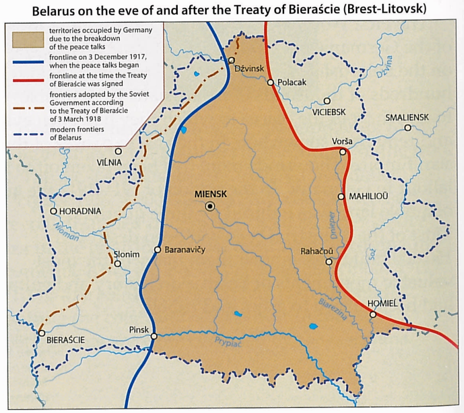
Revolutionary demonstration in Polacak. 1917



None of the other oppressed nations of the former Russian Empire succeeded in bringing together such a representative congress. The First All-Belarusian Congress was attended by 1,872 delegates from all the ethnically Belarusian regions – from Smaliensk in the east to Bielastok in the west.

The call went out from the Congress, 'Long Live the Belarusian Democratic Republic!' The delegates were divided into two camps: one was fighting for the complete independence of Belarus, the other for a Belarusian autonomous republic within Russia. Participants expressed their concern that Trotskii was negotiating a peace treaty with the Germans in Bieraście without taking the interests of Belarus into consideration.

Belarus on the eve of and after the Treaty of Bieraście (Brest-Litovsk)



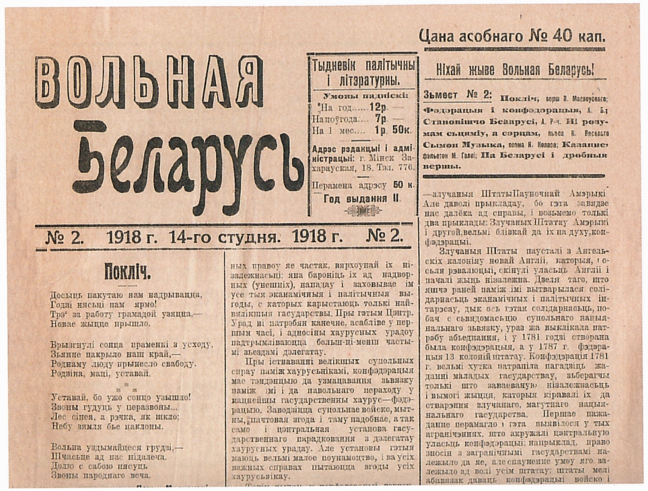
CHRONOLOGY

18 December 1917 – opening of the First All-Belarusian Congress

21 February 1918 – First Constituent Charter

9 March 1918 – Second Constituent Charter

Volnaja Bielaruś (Free Belarus). The newspaper first appeared in June 1917; it was published by the Belarusian National Committee headed by Raman Skirmunt. The Committee made several demands of the Russian Provisional Government in St Petersburg: autonomy and democracy for Belarus, Belarusian-language schools and compensation for losses in the First World War. After the promulgation of the Third Constitutient Charter, the newspaper came out in support of an independent, democratic Belarus and called for the creation of a national Belarusian army


Цана асобнага № 40 кап.

ВОЛЬНАЯ Беларусь

Тыднeвік палітычны і літэратурны.

Умовы падпіскі:
На год...... 12р. —
На поўгода.... 7р. —
На 1 мес.... 1р. 50к.

Адрэс рэданцыі і адміністрацыі: г. Мінск Захараўская, 18. Тэл. 776.

Перамена адрэсу 50 к.

Год выдання II.

Няхай жыве Вольная Беларусь!

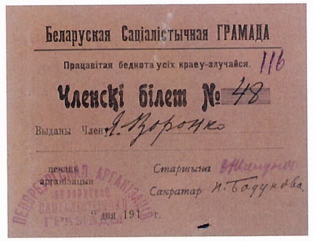
Зьмест № 2: Покліч, верш Н. Масноўскаго; Фэдэрацыя і конфэдэрацыя, А. Б.; Становішча Беларусі, А. Р-ч. Ні розумам сьцяміў, а сэрцам, пьеса Н. Вясельго Сымон Музыка, поэма Я. Коласа; Казание фельетон М. Галкі; На Беларусі і дробныя вершы.

№ 2. 1918 г. 14-го студня. 1918 г. № 2.

Покліч.

Досыць пакутаю нам надрываціа,
Годзі нясьці нам ярмо!
Трэ' за работу грамадой узяцца,—
Новае жыцце прыйшло.


Paluta Badunova, a member of the Central Committee of the Belarusian Socialist *Hramada* and one of the delegates to the All-Belarusian Congress. Photograph of the 1910s


Беларуская Саціалістычная ГРАМАДА

Працаўнікі беднота усіх краеў-злучайся.

Членскі білет № 48

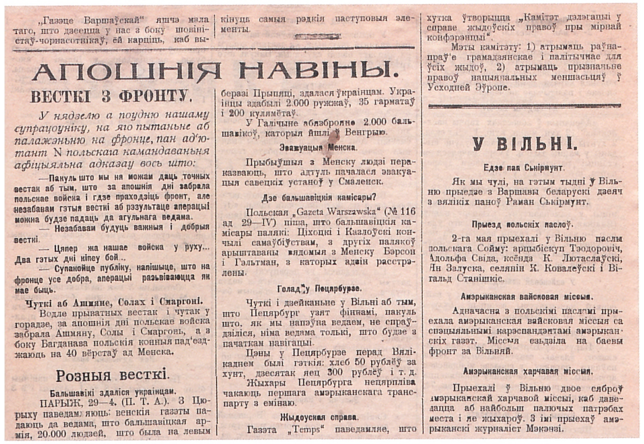
Belarusian Socialist *Hramada* membership card that belonged to Jazep Varonka, a delegate to the First All-Belarusian Congress

The communists were invited to attend the Congress. They declined but nevertheless kept a close eye on what was going on. The so-called North-Western Regional Committee of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party (Bolsheviks), under the leadership of Aleksandr Miasnikov (Miasnikian), denied not only the right of Belarusians to self-determination, but even their very existence as a nation. When the Bolsheviks saw that the supporters of full independence were gaining the upper hand in the Congress, they used military force to break it up. The decree that authorised the disbanding of the Congress was signed by Karl Lander, Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Western Region.



The Congress was forced to suspend its session and the Bolsheviks arrested some of the delegates. However, the Miensk railway workers offered the Congress delegates refuge. Under their protection the Council of the All-Belarusian Congress – to which the delegates to the Congress had transferred authority in the region – elected an Executive Committee from among its members. It was headed by Jazep Varonka, one of the leaders of the Belarusian Socialist *Hramada*.

First All-Belarusian Congress began its work in the building of the Miensk City Theatre (now the Janka Kupala National Theatre). Postcard of the early 20th century



„Газэце Варшаўскай" яшчэ мала таго, што дзеецца у нас з боку шовіністаў-чорнасотнікаў, ёй карціць, каб выкінуць самыя рэдкія паступовыя элементы.

АПОШНІЯ НАВІНЫ.

ВЕСТКІ З ФРОНТУ.

У нядзелю а поудню нашаму супрацоуніку, на яго пытаньне аб палажэньню на фронце, пан ад'ютант N польскага камандаваньня афіцыяльна адказау вось што:

— Пакуль што мы ня можам даць точных вестак аб тым, што за апошнія дні забрала польскае войска і гдзе праходзіць фронт, але незабавам гэтыя весткі аб рэзультаце аперацыі можна будзе падаць да агульнага ведама.

— Незабавам будуць важныя і добрыя весткі.

— Цяпер жа нашае войска у руху... Два гэтых дні кіпеу бой...

— Супакойце публіку, напішыце, што на фронце усе добра, аперацыі разьвіваюцца як мае быць.

Чуткі аб Ашмяне, Солах і Смаргоні.

Водле прыватных вестак і чутак у горадзе, за апошнія дні польскае войска забрала Ашмяну, Солы і Смаргонь, а з боку Багданава польскія конныя пад'езджаюць на 40 вёрстаў ад Менска.

Розныя весткі.

Бальшавікі здаліся украінцам.

ПАРЫЖ, 29—4. (П. Т. А.). З Цюрыху паведамляюць: венскія газэты падаюць да ведама, што бальшавіцкая армія, 20.000 людзей, што была на левым беразі Прыпяці, здалася ўкраінцам. Украінцы здабылі 2.000 ружжаў, 35 гарматаў і 200 кулямётаў.

У Галічыне абязброяна 2.000 бальшавікоў, каторыя йшлі ў Венгрыю.

Эвакуацыя Менска.

Прыбыўшыя з Менску людзі пераказваюць, што адтуль пачалася эвакуацыя савецкіх установ у Смаленск.

Дзе бальшавіцкія камісары?

Польская „Gazeta Warszawska" (№ 116 ад 29—IV) піша, што бальшавіцкія камісары палякі: Ціхоцкі і Казлоўскі кончылі самаўбіўствам, з другіх палякоў арыштаваны вядомыя з Менску Бэрсон і Гэльтман, з каторых адзін расстраляны.

Голад у Пецярбурзе.

Чуткі і двейканьне у Вільні аб тым, што Пецярбург узят фінамі, пакуль што, як мы напэўна ведаем, не спраўдзіліся, німа ведама толькі, што будзе з пачаткам навігацыі.

Цэны у Пецярбурзе перад Вялікаднем былі гэткія: хлеб 50 рублёў за хунт, дзесятак яец 300 рублёў і т. д.

Жыхары Пецярбурга нецярпліва чакаюць першага амэрыканскага транспарту з емінаю.

Жыдоуская справа.

Газэта „Temps" паведамляе, што хутка ўтворыцца „Камітэт дэлегацыі у справе жыдоўскіх правоў пры мірнай конфэрэнцыі".

Мэты камітэту: 1) атрымаць раўнапраў'е грамадзянскае і палітычнае для ўсіх жыдоў, 2) атрымаць прызнаньне правоў нацыянальных меншасьцяў ў Усходней Эўропе.

У ВІЛЬНІ.

Едзе пан Сьнірмунт.

Як мы чулі, на гэтым тыдні ў Вільню прыедзе з Варшавы беларускі дзеяч з вялікіх паноў Раман Ськівмунт.

Прыезд польскіх паслоў.

2-га мая прыехалі у Вільню паслы польскага Сойму: арцыбіскуп Тэодоровіч, Адольфа Свіда, ксёндз К. Лютаслаўскі, Ян Залуска, селянін К. Ковалеўскі і Вітальд Станішкіс.

Амэрыканская вайсковая місыя.

Адначасна з польскімі паслямі прыехала амэрыканская вайсковая місыя са спэцыяльнымі карэспандэнтамі амэрыканскіх газэт. Місыя езьдзіла на баевы фронт за Вільняй.

Амэрыканская харчавая місыя.

Прыехалі ў Вільню двое сяброў амэрыканскай харчавой місыі, каб даведацца аб найбольш палючых патрэбах места і яе жыхароў. З імі прыехаў амэрыканскі журналіст Мэкэнзі.

The latest news in the democratic newspaper *Bielaruskaja Dumka* (Belarusian Thought)

On 18 February the Germans began to advance on Miensk. On the next day the Bolsheviks fled the city and the Executive Committee of the Congress came out of hiding. In its First Constituent Charter it proclaimed itself the sole provisional authority in Belarus and got down to work on convening an All-Belarusian Constituent Assembly that would be elected by universal suffrage.



Raman Skirmunt, chairman of the Belarusian National Committee, delegate to the First All-Belarusian Congress, and subsequently a member of the Council of the Belarusian Democratic Republic and head of its government. Photograph of the 1910s

The First Constituent Charter to the peoples of Belarus

Our native land finds itself in a new and difficult situation. The fate of the regime that was here previously is not known. We face the possible occupation of our land by German troops.

We must take our fate into our own hands. The Belarusian people must assert their right to full self-determination, and the national minorities their right to national and personal autonomy.

The rights of the nation should find realisation by means of a Constituent Assembly convened on democratic principles.

However, even before convening the Constituent Assembly, all power in Belarus should belong to the peoples residing therein.

The Executive Committee of the Council (*Rada*) of the First All-Belarusian Congress, supplemented by representatives of the revolutionary democracy of the national minorities and fulfilling the goals imposed upon it by the Congress, declares itself to be the Provisional Authority in Belarus to govern the land and to convene as soon as possible an All-Belarusian Constituent Assembly based on universal voting rights for the entire adult population without distinction of nationality, religion, or gender…

Given in Miensk, 21 (8) February 1918

Train station in Miensk. Early 20th-century postcard



The Executive Committee formed a government – a National Secretariat headed by Jazep Varonka. However, the Germans were now the occupying power in Miensk. They confiscated the Secretariat's money, tore down the white-red-white flag from the building where it met and drove the officials out. In spite of this the Executive Committee of the All-Belarusian Congress continued to function and once again addressed a Constituent Charter to the people of Belarus, spelling out the country's form of government and the rights and freedoms of its citizens.



Tamaš Hryb, delegate and member of the Executive Committee of the Council of the All-Belarusian Congress. 1920s



Anton Luckievič, politician, prime mover behind the declaration of independence of the Belarusian Democratic Republic. Photograph of the 1930s



БЕЛАРУСКІ ШЛЯХ

Штодзенная грамадзка-палітычная газэта.

Серпухоуская вул. д. № 12

Цана асобн. нум. 15 к.

№ 2. Мінск Панядзелак 25 сакавіка 1918 г. Год I.

Newspaper *Bielaruski Šliach* (Belarusian Way). 1918

The Second Constituent Charter to the peoples of Belarus

During this World War in which some powerful states have been destroyed and previously oppressed peoples liberated, the people of Belarus have awoken and are building a state of their own. After three and a half centuries of subjugation, the Belarusan nation once more declares to the entire world that it lives and is determined to go on living. The Supreme National Assembly – the All-Belarusian Congress of 5–17 December 1917 – in its concern for the future of Belarus, confirmed a republican form of government within its territory…

German soldiers on Cathedral Square (now Freedom Square) in Miensk. Postcard. 1918



1. Belarus, within the areas where Belarusians are settled and make up the majority of the population, is declared to be a Democratic Republic.
2. The Constitution and laws of the Belarusian Democratic Republic will be adopted by the Constituent Assembly of Belarus, convened on the principles of universal, equal, direct, secret, and proportional suffrage without regard to gender, nationality, or religion.
3. Until such time as the Constituent Assembly of Belarus convenes, the legislative authority in the Belarusian Democratic Republic shall belong to the Council of the All-Belarusian Congress, augmented by representatives of the national minorities of Belarus.
4. Executive and administrative authority in the Belarusian Democratic Republic shall belong to the National Secretariat of Belarus which shall be appointed by the Council of the Congress and answerable to it.
5. Within the frontiers of the Belarusian Democratic Republic there shall be freedom of speech and the press, freedom of association and assembly, freedom to strike, unconditional freedom of conscience, inviolability of the person and the home.
6. Within the frontiers of the Belarusian Democratic Republic all the nationalities shall have the right to national and personal autonomy; all the languages of the peoples of Belarus shall enjoy equal rights.
7. Within the frontiers of the Belarusian Democratic Republic the right to private ownership of land is abolished. Ownership of the land is to be transferred without redemption payment to those who work it. Forests, lakes, and natural resources are declared to be the property of the Belarusian Democratic Republic.

Within the frontiers of the Belarusian Democratic Republic the working day shall not exceed a maximum of eight hours…

Given in Miensk, 9 March 1918



Postcard of the period of the Belarsuian Democratic Republic depicting the Belarusian national flag

THE BELARUSIAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

The idea of independence was attracting more and more adherents. The Executive Committee of the Council of the All-Belarusian Congress now declared the Council to be the Council of the Belarusian Democratic Republic. Representatives of the Vilnia Belarusian Council and those renowned figures of the Belarusian revival, the brothers Ivan and Anton Luckievič and Vaclaŭ Lastoŭski, were co-opted on to the Council as members.

On 23 March Anton Luckievič spoke at a session of the National Secretariat. He said that formally Belarus was still part of Russia, since neither of the Constituent Charters abolished the federal link with Russia that had been proclaimed at the Congress.



National Secretariat (the first government of the Belarusian Democratic Republic) from left to right, (standing): Arkadź Smolič, Piotra Kračeŭski, Kastuś Jezavitaŭ, Anton Aŭsianik, Liavon Zajac; (seated): Alieś Burbis (the Consul of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in Moscow), Ivan Sierada, Jazep Varonka (Chairman), Vasil Zacharka

Events amply showed that there was no point in placing any hopes on Belarus' eastern neighbour. Without asking the Belarusians Russia and Germany divided Belarus between them as a result of the Treaty of Bieraście (Brest-Litovsk).

The Council of the Belarusian Democratic Republic began its session at 8 o'clock on the evening of 24 March. It worked through the night and early the next morning adopted the following document:



Cathedral Square in Miensk. Photograph. 1919

CHRONOLOGY

25 March 1918 – declaration of independence of the Belarusian Democratic Republic

1 January 1919 – declaration by the Bolsheviks of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic



Vaclaŭ Lastoŭski headed the government of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in the years 1919–1923. Photograph. 1921

Ivan Luckievič. His ideas were the driving force behind the Belarusian national movement of which he was a founder. Photograph. 1916



Newspaper *Volnaja Bielaruś* with the text of the Third Constituent Charter



Цана асобнага № 40 кап.

ВОЛЬНАЯ БЕЛАРУСЬ

Тыднеўік палітычны і літэратурны.

Умовы падпіскі:
На год......12р. —
На поўгода.... 7р. —
На 1 мес.... 1р. 50к.

Адрэс рэдакцыі і адміністрацыі: г. Мінск Захараўская, 18. Тэл. 776.

Перамена адрэсу 50 к.

Год выдання II.

Ніхай жыве Вольная Беларусь!

Зьмест № 11: Устаўная Грамата; Вольная Беларусь; Рашучы акт, стацця Н. Н.; Што значыць пан, што мужык а што хам, Н. Чарноцкага; Залеты, Н. Прыгаворкі; З вершаў Надсона, Макара; Кроніка, і др.

№ 11. 1918 г. 31-го сакавіка 1918 г. № 11.

Устаўная Грамата Рады Беларускай Народнай Рэспублікі.

Год назад народы Беларусі разам з народамі Расіі скінулі ярмо Расійскаго царызму, які найцяжэй прыціснуў быў Беларусь; ні пытаючыся народу, ён укінуў наш край у пажар вайны, якая чыста зруйнавала гарады і вёскі беларускія. Цяпер мы, Рада Беларускай Народнай Рэспублікі, скідаем з роднаго краю апошняе ярмо дзяржаўнай залежнасьці, якое гвалтам накінулі расійскія цары на наш вольны і нізалежны край. Ад гэтаго часу БЕЛАРУСКАЯ НАРОДНАЯ РЭСПУБЛІКА АБВЕШЧАЕЦЦА НІЗАЛЕЖНАЙ І ВОЛЬНАЙ ДЗЯРЖАВАЙ. Самі народы Беларусі, у асобі свайго Устаноўчаго Сойму, пастановяць аб будучых дзяржаўных зьвязях Беларусі.

На моцы гэтаго траціць сілу усе старыя дзяржаўныя зьвязі, якія далі магчымасьць чужому ураду падпісаць і за Беларусь трактат у Берэсьці, што забівае на сьмерць беларускі народ, дзелючы зямлю яго на часткі. На моцы гэтаго урад Беларускай Народнай Рэспублікі мае ўвайсьці ў адносіны з зацікаўленымі старонамі, прапануючы ім перагледзіць тую часьціну Берэсьцейскаго трактату, якая датычыць Беларусі, і падпісаць мірову ўмову з усімі ваеваўшымі дзяржавамі.

Беларуская Народная Рэспубліка павінна абняць усе землі, дзе жыве і мае лічбенную перавагу беларускі народ, а ласьне: Магілеўшчыну, беларускія часьці Міншчыны, Гродзеншчыны (з Гродной, Белastокам і інш.) Віленшчыны, Віцебшчыны, Смаленшчыны, Чарнігоўшчыны і сумежныя часьці суседніх губэрняў, заселеныя беларусамі.

Беларуская Народная Рэспубліка падцьверджывае усе тыя правы і вольнасьці грамадзян і народаў Беларусі, якія абвешчаны Устаўной Граматай ад 9 сакавіка 1918 г.

Абвешчаючы аб нізалежнасьці Беларускай Народнай Рэспублікі, Рада яе паклацае свае надзеі на тое, што усе любячыя волю народы дапамогуць беларускаму народу ў поўнай меры здзейсьніць яго палітычна-дзяржаўныя ідэалы.

Рада Беларускай Народнай Рэспублікі.

Дана у Менску Беларускім 24 сакавіка 1918 году.

Вольная Беларусь.

Цяжка стало на Беларусі,—цяжка і сумна, як у гасподзе абяздоленаго. Зруйнованы гарады, папалены вёскі, разбураны сады, навырубаны дзядоўскія пушчы. Змоўклі абшары, ні гамоніць шчыр-боры.

І як з руін занівaду, як з ложа пакуты устае Беларусь і голасам поўным жалю і нілюдзкае мукі абвешчае сьвету, што жыве яна і жыць хоча і жыць яна будзе.

Рада Беларускай Народнай Рэспублікі абвесьціла, што Беларусь становіцца нізалежнай і вольнай дзяржавай. Скінуто з роднаго краю апошняе ярмо дзяржаўнай залежнасьці, якое гвалтам накінулі расійскія цары на наш вольны і нізалежны край. «На моцы гэтаго», уставуе Грамата: «траціць сілу усе старыя дзяржаўныя зьвязі, якія далі магчымасьць чужому ураду падпісаць і за Беларусь трактат у Берэсьці, што забівае беларускі народ на сьмерць, дзелючы зямлю яго на часткі.»

Як разсякаючы страшную ціпу, што агарнула наш край спакон веку, разносецца вестка па усяму сьвету, што жыве Беларусь, што горо айчыны нашай вядзе нас ні к сьмерці, а к жыццю. Шлях ратунку знайдзен. Уваскросла

Беларусь! Паўстало к жыццю тое, што ворагі пахавалі. Ажывае гістарычная дзяржаўная Белая Русь!

Рашучы акт.

А 6-й гадзіне на ранку 25 сакавіка Рада Беларускае Народнае Рэспублікі большасьцю галасоў пастанавіла аб тым, што Беларуская Рэспубліка абвешчаецца нізалежнаю. У той самы дзень, посьля дванадцатае гадзіны, так само большасьцю галасоў Рады, выдана Устаўная Грамата, у якой, разам с пастановаю аб нізалежнасьці, адзначано, што траціць сілу старыя дзяржаўныя зьвязі, даваўшыя права чужому ураду падпісаць у Берэсьці міравы трактат аб раздзяленню Беларусі і што Урад Беларускай Народнай Рэспублікі павінен дамагацца перагляду гэткаго становішча Беларусі у інтарэсах яе падзялімасьці і еднасьці.

Вышэй памяненым актам аб нізалежнасьці, беларускі народ на увесь сьвет чадае голасна знаць аб сабе, аб жаху яго сьмяртэльнаго раздзелу беларускай тэррыторыі, які зроблен праз гістарычныя старыя адносіны Беларусі да Масквоўшчыны, што на працягу каля поўтары соткі гадоў аж да апошняго часу лічылася з нашаю бацькаўшчынай толькі як с правінцыяю, праводзючы жудасную ассымілятарскую палітыку. Бальшэвіцкі ўрад ні вытрымаў да канца тону Троцкаго і мусіў такі падпісацца пад тою міравою умоваю, якую вымагалі рэальныя палітычныя абстановы. Ведама, глядзючы, як на частку Расіі, як на маўчлівую яе правінцыю, мог тое самае зрабіць і усялякі іншы Петраградзкі або Маскоўскі Урад, ні гледзючы на тое, з якіх ен быў бы складзены партыяў. Але калі паглядзець на гэту справу вачыма беларуса (да якої б ен партыі ні належаў), дык усе гэта робіцца йнакшым. Гвалтам расійскіх цароў народ беларускі быў так прыціснуты, што ні мог вольна і адважна разьвіваць свае нацыянальна-культурнае багацце, сваю духоўную істоту. Праз ассымляцыю яго інтэлігенцыя адхілялася у бок, мова яго зрабілася «простаю», ен стаў «простым», «тутэйшым рускім» (або «палякам», калі ен каталіцкай веры) і быў толькі цестам, з якога царскія чыноўнікі лясілі, што сабе хацелі, прыдумвалі дзеля яго усялякаго гатунку вырабы, абы толькі стаў ен «искони русскимъ и православнымъ». І вось загрукацела год таму назад равалюцыя, зазьвінелі

The Third Constituent Charter of the Council of the Belarusian Democratic Republic

One year has passed since the peoples of Belarus, together with the peoples of Russia, cast off the yoke of Russian tsarism which had oppressed Belarus most of all. Without asking the people, the tsarist government threw our land into the inferno of a war which has completely destroyed the towns and villages of Belarus. We, the Council of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, now cast off the final yoke of national dependence imposed on our free and independent land by the Russian tsars. From this moment we proclaim the Belarusian Democratic Republic an independent and free state. It is for the peoples of Belarus themselves, through a Constituent Assembly, to determine the relations that they shall have with other states.

By virtue of this proclamation we abrogate all previous relations with other states. These relations permitted a foreign government to sign the Treaty of Bieraście on behalf of Belarus and thereby condemned the Belarusian people to death by partitioning their land. By virtue of this proclamation the government of the Belarusian Democratic Republic intends to enter into negotiations with all interested parties, to review those parts of the Treaty which affect Belarus and to sign a peace treaty with all belligerent states.

The territory of the Belarusian Democratic Republic must include all the lands where the Belarusians are in a numerical majority, *viz* the Mahilioŭ region, the Belarusian parts of the regions of Miensk, Horadnia (including the cities of Horadnia, Bielastok and others), Vilnia, Viciebsk, Smaliensk, and Chernihiv, as well as the adjacent parts of neighbouring governorates inhabited by Belarusians.

The Belarusian Democratic Republic confirms all the rights and freedoms of the citizens and peoples of Belarus proclaimed by the Constituent Charter of 9 March 1918.

In proclaiming the independence of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, the Council rests its hopes on the support of all freedom-loving peoples in assisting the Belarusian people to realise their political and national ideals to the fullest possible extent.

The Council of the Belarusian Democratic Republic
Given in Miensk, 24 March 1918



Seal of the Ministry of Defence of the Belarusian Democratic Republic



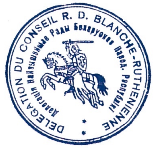
Seal of the Ministry of the Interior of the Belarusian Democratic Republic



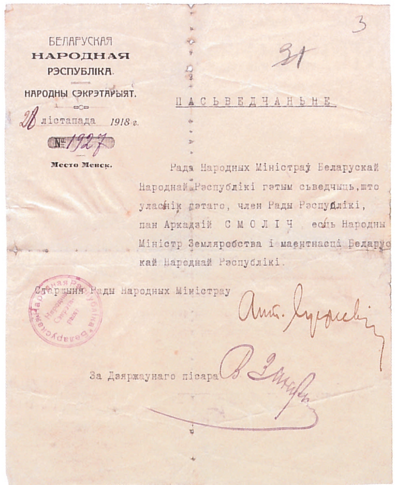
Seal of the Belarusian Grammar School in Vilnia







Seals of state institutions of the Belarusian Democratic Republic



БЕЛАРУСКАЯ НАРОДНАЯ РЭСПУБЛІКА.
НАРОДНЫ СЭКРЭТАРЫЯТ.
28 лістапада 1918 г.
№ 1927
Место Менск.

ПАСЬВЕДЧАНЬНЕ

Рада Народных Міністраў Беларускай Народнай Рэспублікі гэтым сьведчыць, што уласьнік гэтага, член Рады Рэспублікі, пан Аркадзій СМОЛІЧ ёсьць Народны Міністр Земляробства і маентнасці Беларускай Народнай Рэспублікі.

Старшыня Рады Народных Міністраў

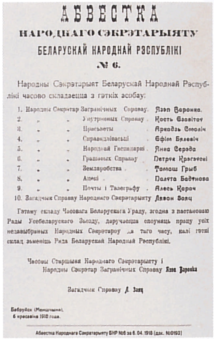
За Дзяржаўнага пісара

Confirmation of appointment of Arkadź Smolič as a member of the Council of the Belarusian Democratic Republic. This would have served as a form of ID



Arkadź Smolič, Minister of Education in the first government of the Belarusian Democratic Republic. Photograph. 1921





АБВЕСТКА
НАРОДНАГО СЭКРЭТАРЫЯТУ
БЕЛАРУСКАЙ НАРОДНАЙ РЭСПУБЛІКІ
№ 6.

Announcement of the composition of the National Secretariat of the Belarusian Democratic Republic

Building where the independence of the Belarusian Democratic Republic was proclaimed. Now 9 Valadarski Street. Drawing by Viktar Staščaniuk. 1988



Plaque from the building of the Military and Diplomatic Mission of the Belarusian Democratic Republic to Latvia and Estonia



Kastuś Jezavitaŭ, one of the signatories to the declaration of independence of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, a member of its Council and National Secretary for Military Affairs in the first government. Horadnia. 1919



БЕЛАРУСКАЯ ДУМКА
Цана нумару 50 кап.
ВЫХОДЗІЦЬ ТРОЙЧЫ У ТЫДЗЕНЬ.
Год I. Вільня, Серада 21 мая 1919 г. № 11.

БЕЛАРУСКІ СХОД.
У нядзелю 25-га мая, у 5 гадзін па палудні адбудзецца беларускі сход.

На сход запрашаюцца усе беларусы-жыхары м. Вільні.

Newspaper *Bielaruskaja Dumka* consistently supported the independence and unity of Belarus. In July 1919 it was closed by the Polish occupation forces

Klaŭdus Duž-Dušeŭski, designer of the state flag of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, secretary of the Lastoŭski government in 1919–1923. Photograph. 1921



The Act of 25 March was a decisive protest against the partitioning of Belarus between the Germany of Kaiser Wilhelm II and the Russia of the Bolsheviks. For the first time ever the whole region inhabited by Belarusians had been declared one single democratic state. The National Secretariat approved the state seal depicting the *Pahonia*. There was a plan to set up a Belarusian university in Miensk, as well as a Belarusian college for training the officials needed by the new state. Courses in Belarusian language, history and culture were provided for Belarusians and people of other nationalities. A start was made on establishing economic and commercial ties between Belarus and other countries. A Belarus Chamber of Commerce and a Belarus-Ukraine Association for the development of closer relations began to operate in Kyiv.

No one could claim any more that there was no such thing as a Belarusian nation.



Diplomatic passport of the Belarusian Democratic Republic issued to Klaŭdus Duž-Dušeŭski







The history of Belarus shows convincingly that it is a European country
with a rich and glorious past.

Belarus has a tradition of statehood that goes back more than one thousand years. It begins with the Principality of Polacak, a powerful mediaeval state that occupied most of the territory of present-day Belarus and had an outlet to the Baltic Sea. In the 13th century the Belarusian lands formed the nucleus of a new state – the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, where Belarusian culture was dominant and Belarusian was the official language. In joining together within the Grand Duchy the Belarusian principalities escaped the oppression of the Mongol-Tatar yoke that weighed so heavily on their Russian counterparts. The Grand Duchy was able to defend itself against invasion from both the west and the east. Belarusian warriors won eternal glory for themselves in the victorious battles of Grunwald and Vorša.

Belarus was an integral part of European civilisation. Our towns, like those elsewhere in Europe, enjoyed the Magdeburg Law. The Grand Duchy became the easternmost outpost of the Renaissance. Thanks to the great humanist Francišak Skaryna the Belarusians had a printed Bible in their own language before the Poles and the *Lietuviai*, Ukrainians and Russians, Serbs and Bulgarians, the English and the French.

The Statute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, adopted in 1588, was the most advanced collection of laws in the Europe of the time.

The political decay of the Commonwealth, of which the Grand Duchy had become part as a result of the Union of Lublin, led to the seizure of the Belarusian lands by the Russian Empire. The forefathers of modern Belarusians did not, however, simply submit. They rose in rebellion against foreign rule time and time again. Among Kalinoŭski's brothers-in-arms were many who were fighting for a future democratic Belarus, not just a restoration of the Commonwealth.

At the beginning of the 20th century the process of national revival had reached the stage where the renewal of Belarusian statehood was definitely on the agenda.

An independent Belarusian Democratic Republic was declared on 25 March 1918.

Belarus entered the 21st century still striving to find its rightful place in the European community of democratic nations.

Our common European heritage will help us achieve this goal.



Names of the key personalities in Belarusian history and culture, spelt in Belarusian and in other common forms

Ahinski, Michal Klieafas – *Ogiński, Michał Kleofas*
Aĺhierd – *Algirdas, Olgierd*
Astrožski, Kanstancin – *Ostrogski, Konstanty; Ostrozhsky, Konstantin*
Bahuševič, Francišak – *Bohuszewicz, Franciszek*
Batura, Ściapan – *Báthory István; Batory, Stefan; Báthory, Stephen*
Budny, Symon – *Budny, Szymon*
Chadkievič, Jan Karoĺ – *Chodkiewicz, Jan Karol*
Damiejka, Ihnat – *Domeyko, Ignacy; Domeyko, Ignacio*
Dmachoŭski, Hienryk – *Dmochowski (Dmachowski), Henryk; Saunders, Henry D.*
Dunin-Marcinkievič, Vincent – *Dunin-Marcinkiewicz, Wincenty*
Eŭfrasińnia of Polacak – *Euphrosyne of Polotsk*
Hiedzimin – *Gediminas, Giedymin*
Hryniavicki, Ihnat – *Grinevitskii, Ignatii*
Husoŭski, Mikola – *Hussovianus, Nicolaus*
Jahajla – *Jogaila, Władysław II Jagiełło, Ladislaus II Jagiello*
Jasinski, Jakub – *Jasiński, Jakub*
Kalinoŭski, Kastuś – *Kalinowski, Konstanty*
Karski, Jaŭchim – *Karskii, Evfimii*
Kaściuška, Tadevuš – *Kościuszko, Tadeusz*
Kavalieŭskaja, Sofja – *Kowalevski, Sophie; Kovalevskaya, Sofia; Kowalewski, Sonja*
Kavalieŭski, Uladzimir – *Kovalevskii, Vladimir*
Kiejstut – *Kęstutis*
Kiryla of Turaŭ – *Cyril of Turov*
Kuncevič, Jazafat – *Kuntsevych, Josafat; Kuncewicz, Jozafat*
Liaščynski, Stanislaŭ – *Leszczyński, Stanisław*
Maniuška, Stanislaŭ – *Moniuszko, Stanisław*
Mickievič, Adam – *Mickiewicz, Adam*
Mindaŭ – *Mindaugas, Mendog, Mindowe*
Paciej, Ipat – *Potej, Hypatius*
Paniatoŭski, Stanislaŭ Aŭhust – *Poniatowski, Stanisław August*
Pliater, Emilija – *Plater, Emilia*
Radzivil, Januš – *Radziwiłł, Janusz*
Radzivil, Juraj – *Radziwiłł, Jerzy*
Radzivil, Mikalaj 'the Black' – *Radziwiłł, Mikołaj Czarny*
Radzivil, Mikalaj Kryštop 'the Orphan' – *Radziwiłł, Mikołaj Krzysztof Sierotka*
Radzivil, Mikalaj 'the Red' – *Radziwiłł, Mikołaj Rudy*
Rahnieda – *Rognieda*
Rahvalod – *Rogvolod*
Rejtan, Tadevuš – *Reytan (Rejtan), Tadeusz*
Rucki, Jazep – *Ruts'kyi, Yosyf*
Sapieha, Lieŭ – *Sapieha, Lew*
Sierakoŭski, Zyhmunt – *Sierakowski, Zygmunt*
Simiaon of Polacak – *Simeon of Polotsk*
Skaryna, Francišak – *Skoryna, Francis*
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Tyškievič, Kanstancin – *Tyszkiewicz, Konstanty*
Usiaslaŭ the Sorcerer – *Vseslav the Sorcerer*
Valovič, Astafiej – *Wołłowicz, Ostafi (Eustachy)*
Vitaŭt – *Vytautas, Witold*
Žyhimont Aŭhust – *Zygmunt II August, Sigismund II Augustus*
Žyhimont the Old – *Zygmunt I Stary, Sigismund I the Old*





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